

THE MASTER'S QUESTIONS
TO HIS DISCIPLES



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The Master's questions to
his disciples

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TO
HIS DISCIPLES

“He to whom the ETERNAL WORD speaks is delivered from a multitude of *opinions*.”—THOMAS A KEMPIS.

The Master's Questions to His Disciples + + +

By the

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P R E F A C E

THE Questions which our Lord addressed to His disciples at various times are here gathered together from the Four Gospels, and arranged to form the basis of a series of meditations for those private hours, whether on the Lord's Day or on other days, which every Christian heart delights to set apart as silent hours with God.

These meditations, being meant for Christians, have been written in such a personal form that each reader may adopt them as his own.

I have purposely omitted all those often deeply suggestive questions which Christ addressed to the general multitude, to the undecided, and to His open foes; and have confined myself entirely to those which He addressed to His own disciples and friends. I have also purposely called them "The MASTER's Questions," rather than "The Questions of Jesus," in order to emphasise the truth that one of the greatest needs of the day is that Christian men and women should realise for themselves, and exhibit to others, *His absolute sovereignty over them*, as the supreme Lord of the conscience, the will, the affections, and the life; and should in this way prove, not merely their

love to One who has redeemed them, but their *surrender* also, to One who, because He has redeemed them, claims them for Himself, and says, "Follow Me."

The treatment of these in this volume is not *Critical*; neither is it greatly *Exegetical*; but almost wholly *Devotional* and *Practical*.

In such a volume there cannot, obviously, be any organic unity: there can only be variety. The Master's questions, asked, as they were, at different times, and in widely differing circumstances, are so distinct and separate from each other that they resemble, not leaves and flowers springing out of the same stem, but rather pearls threaded on one string.

Their very variety, however, invests them with a peculiar interest: for, as will be seen, there is hardly any department of life or of experience which they do not cover; and there is in them a wonderful mingling of warning and of comfort, of keenest heart-searching and of Divinest consolation.

If the blessing of the Great Master Himself shall accompany the reading of these chapters, and any of His disciples be thereby led to a higher faith, a larger trust, a deeper self-scrutiny, and a heartier consecration, my aim in writing them will be attained.

GARELOCHHEAD.

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I

NOT WORRY, BUT TRUST

“Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? Why take ye thought for raiment? . . . If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”—MATTHEW vi. 25-30.

I AM sure there must have been a beautiful smile on the Master's face as He spoke these tender and cheering words to His disciples about simple trustfulness in the Father's care. The perfect trust of His own heart must have been looking out of His eyes straight into theirs as He spoke to them about the birds and the lilies, and said, “Are not ye much better than they?”

What He forbids here is not foresight, but foreboding, which is a very different thing ; not a prudent care for to-morrow, but that distracting and faithless anxiety which anticipates to-morrow

tremblingly, always imagining the worst. "Do not look out upon your life," says the Master, "with this tormenting and useless fear, but rather with the calmest trust; and that just because the God of your life is your Father which is in heaven. He is the *God* of the ravens and the flowers, but He is infinitely more to you. He is *Father*, and not merely God. The eye that bends over you is a Father's eye; the heart that compassionates you is a Father's heart; the hand that provides for you is a Father's hand; and He loves His children as He does not love His birds and lilies. These sometimes lack and fade, but He loves His own children far too well to let *them* "want any good thing."

Here, then, is my Lord's simple, all-sufficient recipe for a safe and happy life, "Leave everything to the love of your Father in heaven; be as a child in His house, and let Him do all the house-keeping for you." No being on earth is so absolutely free from anxiety as a little child. How he is to be provided for he does not know. Where his next meal is to come from he cannot tell. All that he knows is that loving hearts are caring for him, and so he feels sure they will not let him starve. That is really how God would have *me* feel. A child in my Father's house, a child of His love! What more do I need than just to be sure of that? With this great Father to care for me, is it worth my while to wear my life out with

restless anxieties that, even at the best, can do nothing to secure for me the happiness I seek? The teaching of my Master here is that God, as every wise and loving Father does, makes provision for His children's need *before* the need has arisen. The world was full of bird-sustenance before a single bird was in it. It was full of flower-sustenance before a flower was born. He did not create the birds and then cage them somewhere till He could provide an atmosphere. He did not create lilies and then force them to lie aside till He had leisure to provide their soil. His rule was life-sustenance first, and then the life that needs it. Now, if He has already provided for all my possible needs, I do not need to ask Him to create supplies for me. They are *waiting for me*—He knows where—and He will bring them out of His treasury just when my need has come.

So then He would raise me out of that self-tormenting anxiety, that sees difficulties and trials on every horizon, but never thinks of lifting the face to the blue heaven overhead; that always takes the darkest view of things, and is half angry with any one who suggests that the picture may have a brighter side; that turns the whole joy of life into a pile of ruins, and invites every passer-by to come and look upon the desolation. That is not only folly, it is sin; and will inevitably lead on to greater sin, to bitter discontent, to murmuring against both God and man, to a hard "fretting

against the Lord." And yet, what multitudes of such careworn and unhappy souls there are! Sometimes, as I pass along a crowded street, I note the faces of those I meet, and am surprised to see so few that tell of a calm and happy heart beneath it. I see traces of many other things: hard lines that tell of avarice, of irritability and bad temper, of pride and vanity, of gay indifference, of lust and vice. One here and there bears marks of thought and energy, of high purpose and strenuousness; but few have the peaceful, restful look of a soul that is tranquil and calm. Surely it cannot be the will of God that such burdens should be made out of daily work, or such heavy loads be carried by anxious-minded men, when they might so easily be set at liberty, if they would only give God their burdens, and get, in exchange, His peace.

There is, of course, a whole class of anxieties which I cannot ask God to carry for me or help me in: the cares that I needlessly and even rebelliously make for myself; that do not come to me from Him at all, but are manufactured out of my own pride and self-will; cares that I persist in carrying, though He is asking me to let them drop. But since all the worries of life have to do either with lawful or with unlawful things, there is no need for my heart being burdened with either kind. If my anxieties are about *lawful* things, my Lord offers to relieve me by carrying them for me; and if they are about *unlawful* things, I must, for my

soul's life, lay them down at once; and if I am ever in doubt to which of these two classes I must refer some anxiety that is pressing me hard, the quickest way of solving the doubt will be to take it to the Lord Himself on bended knee. There is nothing like the ordeal of honest prayer for testing the righteousness of earthly solitudes. How often would that ordeal reveal the truth that a large proportion of them are due simply to pride, or self-indulgence, or self-will!

These questions of the Master's also suggest that a large number of troublesome anxieties arise, not out from evils of my own *making*, but from evils of my own *imagining*. The chief things that darken the outlook are things that never happen! Fear of trouble is always harder to bear than trouble itself. For real trials I have the promise of my Father's help. For my own dismal forebodings He makes no provision at all. There seems to be also a suggestion here, that it is often *in the small things of life* that I need most my Father's care; and that, if nothing is *too great* to be cast upon His love, nothing is *too insignificant* either. Nothing that troubles the heart of the child can be a trifle to the heart of the Father. When my Master says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things," it is of life's *necessities*, not of its *luxuries*, that He is speaking. I can live without the luxuries, and be completely happy without them, yes, and safer too; for out of

the pleasant warmth of the fire of luxury there often creep not one, but dozens of deadly serpents and fasten on my hand—pride, avarice, selfishness, and many more; but bread and raiment I must have if I am to live at all. The promise is limited to what my Father knows I really need, and when He withholds the other things I ask, I am sure I do not really *need* them, else they would be given.

Dr. Payson, of America, gave a beautiful testimony to this upon his dying bed, when he said: "Christians might save themselves much sorrow, if they would only believe what they profess to believe, that God can make them perfectly happy without any of these things they think essential to their joy. They imagine that if such and such a blessing were taken away, they would be utterly miserable; whereas God can make them a thousand times happier without it than they are. He has been depriving me of one thing after another all my life, but He has always more than supplied its place; and now, when I am lying here a helpless cripple, I am not only happier than I ever was, but happier than I ever expected to be: and I would have saved myself much sorrow if I had only believed this twenty years ago."

My whole life, to its latest hour, is to be one life of trust; and I thank God that He who has redeemed me is not my *sin-bearer* only, but my *sorrow-bearer* and *care-bearer* too. If I have trusted Him with my soul, I may surely trust Him

with everything else. If I am trusting Him for eternity, I may surely trust Him for time. If I trust Him for my everlasting home, I may surely trust Him for my journey to it. But the misery is that, though I am always asking Him to drive, and telling Him that He alone can do it, I all the time persist in seizing the reins myself! It is strange and sad how constantly I betray my unbelief. My very prayers are often full of it. I look up and say, "My Father who art in heaven," but only because the "Lord's Prayer" begins in that way, not because I have any vividly real and comforting sense of being His child in very deed. I listen to the sweet consolations that come from my Master's lips, but the echo of them in my heart is wonderfully poor and thin. I commit my way to Him in beautiful pious phrases that would befit the ripest saint, and immediately proceed to take my own foolish way notwithstanding. Need I wonder that He gives me only a partial peace, when I am giving Him only a partial trust? Need I wonder that when He gets from me only a half-confidence, He gives me only a half-joy?

Would that I had more of Martin Luther's simple faith, who, in a time of much distress, looking out of his window, and seeing a blackbird sitting on a bough and singing its very best in the midst of pelting rain, said, "Why cannot I too sit still and sing, and *let God think for me?*"

II

CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER

“If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?”—MATTHEW vii. 11.

“Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not . . . I cannot rise and give thee. Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.”—LUKE xi. 5-8.

THE Master's question is an argument, and the argument is what is called an *a fortiori* one. It is from the less to the greater; from a poor earthly love to a rich heavenly one; from a love that, at the best, is ignorant, to one that is altogether wise; from an imperfect to a perfect compassion. The love of the best of fathers here is only a poor reflection of the love of the Father who is in heaven, but it *is* a reflection of it for all that. “If you can love your children so,

must not He who implanted that love in you feel the same? If you, being evil, can do that, shall not He who is *infinitely* good do as much, and even more?" So then the foundation on which Christ rests all His teaching about prayer is the real Fatherliness of that great heart in heaven to which I make appeal. It was always to a *Father* that *He* looked up. The Fatherhood of God was to Him the most blessed and most sustaining of all thoughts. The word "Father" was ever on His lips. He scarcely ever spoke either *of* God or *to* God in any other way: "I thank Thee, Father," "even so, Father," "Abba, Father," "Father, glorify Thy name," "Holy Father," "Righteous Father." That was the habitual tone of prayer in Him; and that was the secret of His perfect calm and trust.

Most of the difficulties often felt regarding prayer come from not thinking about God as the Master did; from not realising the tender love of His Fatherly heart and the infinite power of His Fatherly hand. If I think of Him simply as a Ruler or a Judge, I will have little confidence in prayer and little joy: but that one word "Father" gives me both reality and gladness in my prayer-intercourse with Him. Just because He is a *Father*, I can be sure He will listen sympathetically to my cry of need. Just because He is a *wise Father*, I can trust Him to answer the cry in the wisest way. Just because He is a

perfect Father, I can believe that He must have the best of reasons for sometimes refusing my requests. I can say "Thy will be done," not merely because it is an *Omnipotent* will which I cannot resist, nor even because it is a *holy* will which I ought to acquiesce in however hard, but because it is a *Father's* will, the will of one whose only aim it is to make His children pure, as the first thing, and happy, as the next. When I know the Father as Christ did, I shall pray as He did, and get my prayers answered too, as His always were. The Apostle John says: "I write unto you, little children, because ye have *known the Father*." It is only by being as a "little child," simple-hearted, full of faith, that I can know the Father well enough to "assure my heart before Him," when I pray.

Whatever may be said about my general Christian life, must I not confess with shame that this must be said, that it is far too little a life of prayer? The wonderful *privilege* of prayer I do not sufficiently recognise; the *comforting help* of prayer I do not sufficiently enjoy. I would be a holier and a happier Christian if I had more of what an African convert called "the gift of the knees." When I think of it, it is really a marvellous thing that sinful men should be allowed to speak to the High and Holy One; that all, without exception, may tread the open pathway to a "throne of grace." It is only my familiarity

with this truth that blinds me to the wonder of it. If there had been only one spot on earth where God and man could meet, what thousands of sufferers and sorrowers would be always setting out on pilgrimage to reach it! What willing expenditure of time and wealth there would be to get to it even for a day! If there were only one day in each year on which, at that one spot, the God of heaven gave audience to weary men; or if, like Bethesda's pool, it were a place where only the first comer could carry a blessing away, what wistful waiting round it there would be! what feverish haste to be in time! what hot contention for the nearest place! How infinitely precious health and wealth would be, as giving the best chance of reaching that one spot! What terrible misfortunes feebleness and poverty would be, as precluding any hope of getting there at all!

But what is the actual fact? There is no such solitary sacred spot, no such special hour. The whole world is His audience-chamber; His ear is never shut: and yet how few of the world's millions do really ask Him for anything! How much that passes for prayer is only like the reciting of a charm! how much is merely mechanical duty! how few even of those who really pray, pray to Him as to a Father! Surely He may complain of *me*, that I who profess to know him so well, yet speak to him so seldom and ask of Him so little. For His love will give

me not only what I ask, but far beyond it too. Even a deep earthly love grudges nothing : but the love of my Father in heaven, soaring infinitely higher and sinking infinitely deeper than the most self-sacrificing human love ever did, has a "length and breadth and depth and height" that passes knowledge. It is ready to do for me not only what I ask, but "exceeding abundantly above all I can ask or think." Oh, the marvel of it! How much can I find it in my heart to *ask* in some great stress of difficulty or of pain? how much can I ask for others dear to me as well as for myself? Can it be that God is able to give me not only *all* that, but "*above*" all that, "*abundantly above*" it, "*exceeding abundantly above*" it all? And how much can I *think* of as possible for my heart to receive? Can it be that exceeding abundantly above my *thoughts* as well as above my *prayers* He is ready to bless me every day? Then let me never grieve or dishonour such a Father by doubting His love or distrusting His power.

If I could somehow gather up and measure all the golden sunlight that is falling silently over the world to-day, falling on the wastes of desert sands, scattered over the desolation of northern ice, flashing from the waves of a hundred seas, running about the mountains, spreading over the plains, sending innumerable rays into secret places, filling the cup of every flower, shining down the sides of

every blade of grass, resting in beautiful humility on the unloveliest things, the sticks and straws and dust of the street, and even the putrefaction of death, gilding the thatch of the cottage, lighting up the prisoner in his lonely cell, making a rainbow out of every passing shower, giving itself without stint in its grand abundance everywhere—if I could somehow gather all this up, and measure it, and tell how great it is, then perhaps I might be able, but not till then, to understand the exuberant riches of love that are waiting for me to draw upon in my Father's heart and the infinity of the blessings that are in my Father's hand, ready to fall into mine, when I ask Him to send them down.

And I must be asking every hour. In constant prayerfulness my only safety lies. Life is full of surprises; I meet temptation in the most unlikely places. I have sometimes sudden perplexities of conscience about right and wrong. I am uncertain how to say just the right thing, or how to act just in the right way. There is often no time for deliberation. I must act and speak at once, where a mistake may have far more serious issues than I know. My only resource, then, must be a child's cry for a Father's help, a lifting up of my heart to Him in the very moment of the difficulty, with a prayer for light and strength. Good Nehemiah could not only "pray to the God of heaven" secretly, but get an answer to his prayer in that

short interval that separated his hearing of the king's question from his necessarily immediate reply. Prayer will cut many a knot that my own hands cannot untie: and the quickest way to the blessing I am seeking will always be round by the throne of grace. For the true idea of prayer is not simply *petitioning*, it is rather *consulting* God. Often I need more than a presenting of request. I need a consultation with my Father in heaven—telling Him frankly how I feel, and asking Him to tell me how *He* feels about it too. The effect of such a consultation may be to encourage me to pray for that special thing with more assurance than ever; or it may be to make me cease from asking it because I am convinced it is not according to His highest will for me. But either way the object of the consultation has been gained. In either case I get what an old Greek writer calls “the silence of the soul”—that holy silence that ceases from urging the will of the flesh, because it worships only the sweet will of God.

Do I feel as if that were a poor result? Would I wish for more? Let me remember that, in asking my Father to do His will for me, I am only asking Him to give me what is really the highest blessing to myself.

“He knows, and loves, and cares;
Nothing that truth can dim:
He gives His very best to those
That leave the choice to Him.”

And if the Master's question about the "friend at midnight" seems to contradict this teaching, let me remember that He did not make that churlish householder a type of God, or mean to say that God, selfishly unwilling to be disturbed by a cry of need, could yet be persuaded by mere ceaseless importunity. The *contrast*, not the similarity, was the point of His parable. "If the persistent knocking of a needy friend can prevail even with one who is both angry and annoyed, *how much more* will the filial confidence of a needy child be responded to by a loving Father? Therefore "ask, and ye shall receive—knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

III

SUBMISSION IN PRAYER

“What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?”—MATTHEW vii. 9, 10.

THESE questions are in the same line as the last, but they suggest an additional and most profitable thought. The Master supposes that a child will ask only for what is good, and says that, in that case, no loving father would mock his confiding little one by offering him what would sting or kill. But I can turn his question round another way, still keeping to its essential meaning, and put it thus: “if his son asks a stone, *imagining* it to be bread, or a serpent, *supposing* it to be a wholesome fish, will he grant a request so foolish and so ignorant as that?” Thus I am led to the larger teaching of my Lord, which is, that my loving Father will give me only *what He knows is really good*, that I must let Him deal with my prayers in His own wise way, and, for my good, say

“No,” to some of them ; and, looking back to-day upon my past experiences, must I not confess that the granting of some of my impassioned and eager prayers would have been the cruellest thing my God could have done to me ?

It is not wonderful that I should need a Father's refusals as well as a Father's gifts. The heart always gives a bias to the judgment ; and since it is my own judgment of what is good that guides me in any definite request, I necessarily make many mistakes in prayer, so that multitudes of things which my unwisdom seeks, the wiser love of my Father denies. “I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory,” said Moses to God. “You are asking for death,” was God's reply, “for no man can see My face and live.” “Take away my life,” said the petulant Elijah, depressed and weary, “for it is better for me to die than to live.” But had that prayer been granted, what would have become of his glorious translation in the chariot of fire, which was surely a far more triumphant close to such a noble life as his than an unseen death in the wilderness would have been ? “Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom,” was the prayer of the mother of James and John. What a depth of meaning was in the Master's gentle reply, “Ye know not what ye ask” ! I look at His own picture of the King in His kingdom, with the sheep on the

right hand and the goats on the left, and think what the granting of that petition would have been ! It is no proof of our being special favourites of God that all our desires are given. Israel cried for flesh, and "He gave them their request"; but it was destruction to them instead of life.

What impassioned prayers for a renewed lease of life have been uttered in sick-rooms, and even on sick-beds, by those who did recover, contrary to all hope, but lived only to ruin themselves by sin ! How many a father and mother have bent over the couch where a loved child was lying at the point of death, and prayed, with unsubmitive, frantic eagerness, to have that young life spared ; only to find that the child, given back to them as if by miracle, brought down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, leaving them the bitter wail, "Would God that you had died, or that we had died instead of you, twenty years ago !"

It is possible to ask even for *spiritual* blessings which it would be hurtful to receive at once. It is possible to ask for more grace, only to increase a pride of grace. Pride is a most subtle traitor ; and what are really cravings of "the flesh" may sometimes be mistaken for yearnings of "the Spirit." The "Shibboleth" of Gilead and the "Sibboleth" of Ephraim are so much alike that only an experienced ear can detect the difference between them ; and not only so, but God may often withhold a blessing sought, till the heart has

first been emptied of all self-glory, and made humble enough to receive with safety so great a gift. "Did you get low enough to be blessed?" was the question once asked by a saintly man, when speaking to some who had gathered to pray for a revival in the Church. "*Low enough to be blessed*"—that is what God is often waiting for, before an answer to my prayers can come. "Lord, give me loftier views of Christ," is the cry of some eager heart; and God says, "Yes, I will; but first you must have deeper and more humbling views of yourself." "Lord, use me to do great things for Thee." "Yes, but are you completely willing to be only the tool, and not the hand that moves it?" "Lord, I would fain be full of the Holy Ghost and of power; wilt Thou make me a brilliant lamp, giving clear and steady light?" "Yes, but I must first empty you of all your own oil, and so make room for that fulness of the Spirit to get in."

Then, too, the Lord may deny me the thing that I imagine would greatly increase my usefulness, not only because I am not ready enough to receive it, but because He has in view *some wholly different and better way of using me*, of which I know nothing yet. When Paul prayed earnestly and insistently for the removal of the affliction which he called a "thorn in his flesh," it was not because its rankling pain affected his personal comfort, but because it hindered his power for serving the Master. Its removal, therefore, seemed

a thing for which he could legitimately pray ; and he had no hesitation in pressing the case, "I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me." But the thorn was not removed. His heart's desire was granted in a better way. The Lord said to him "My grace is sufficient"—you need nothing more—"My strength is made perfect *in weakness*." There are two ways of helping a man whose weakness cannot bear the load he has to carry : one is, to diminish the burden ; the other is, to strengthen the man. Paul's way would have been the first of these. His Master's kinder and wiser way was the second. His bodily infirmity was to be left as it was ; but it would no longer be felt to be an impediment to his success, however it might still be a pain : for the power of Christ would so rest upon him and increase, that his Master would be more glorified in him than ever before.

How many things there may be in my life too of which I would fain be quit, that I might better serve my Lord ! How often I have said, "Were I only free of this impediment or that, how much more effectively I could work for Him ! Were I only possessed of larger leisure, were I only in better health, were I stronger physically to go out on works of mercy, had I only a more persuasive tongue, were I only more free from the worries of my temporal concerns ; or, were I only out of the atmosphere of utter worldliness which I am daily

compelled to breathe, free from that perpetual fire of sneers which burns me whenever I try to be true to conscience and to God, how gladly and how effectively I would then work for Him." Yes, so *I* have imagined the case. That is just how Paul felt when he pictured to himself the vigour and the joy of a thornless life. And to me therefore comes the same answer from my Master's lips, "My grace is the only thing you need; that grace will come to you sufficient for every hour; and when you carry the riches of heaven in a poor earthen vessel, all the more clearly will it be seen that the excellency of the power is of God and not of you." In this way, as in so many others, I learn to subscribe my own Amen to the words—

"Good when He gives, supremely good;
But good when He denies:
Ev'n crosses from His sovereign hand
Are blessings in disguise."

Can I not remember to-day a time, now perhaps far in the distance behind, when I prayed intensely for the passing away of some great trial that threatened to darken all my life? I prayed, not selfishly or for my own comfort, but for the greater glory of God by me. I knew that it could be overruled to *my own personal sanctification*, if it came; but I could not see how it could possibly be made a help to me *in serving Christ*: and so, for His sake, I prayed that it might pass. But it did not

pass. I had to drink the bitter cup. There was no escape. I drank it *submissively*—that was all I could do. I could not take it *joyfully*. And yet I have lived to see that even for my power to serve, my Master's way was infinitely better than my own way would have been. Ah! my wise and loving Father knew that when I thought I was asking bread, I was asking only a stone, and He was kinder to me than my prayers.

Let me listen, then, as I hear an experienced disciple echoing most exactly the voice of the Master Himself, "In everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God, *and the peace of God that passeth all understanding* shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." It is as if he said: "You have the largest liberty in prayer, ask what you will—and yet I do not say to you that all your requests will be granted you: this I say, that you will get something even better still, your prayer of trust will at least calm the tumult in your breast. It will make you of one mind with your Father in heaven about the thing that troubles you. It will bring you into quiet rest, the rest of an absolute confidence in His perfect love. That is really the best thing even God can give; and, whatever else He refuses, of *this* gift you may be sure."

IV

CONSPICUOUS DISCIPLESHIP

“Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?”—MARK iv. 21.

I AM, first of all, to be a light-receiver, and then a light-diffuser. I cannot shine for Christ until He shines into me; but no sooner do I receive His divine illumination myself than I am expected to illuminate the darkness round about me. My discipleship is to be *real*, that is the first thing—and *visible*, that is the second. “Ye are the light of the world,” said the Master to His Disciples. God’s plan is to save the world by human agency. It might have been otherwise. He might have entrusted to no other hands but Christ’s the bearing of His message of Life, and He might have continued Christ’s personal presence in the world till the work was done. Or He might have given it into angelic hands, as the only created hands fit for a work so great. But *no angel was*

ever sent to preach the gospel to a sinner. It is to men, themselves redeemed, that the work is given of preaching, by lip and life, redemption to the lost. By man came death, and by man must come the resurrection of the dead. It is high honour to be called to continue in the world the shining that Christ began. It is honour, blessedness, responsibility all in one.

Let me remember, in my own Christian life, that the sole end for which a candle is lit is to give light to those that would be in darkness without it; for, too many Christians seem to think that their own personal life is the only thing they need to care about. To preserve their own light is all they seek: and the natural consequence is that thus safe-guarding the light under a bushel, their candle grows dimmer gradually, till it dies from want of air. A self-included discipleship is a very *useless* one; but the *danger* of it is that it will soon cease to be a discipleship at all. One of the old prophets spoke of the coming of a day when a man should "*no more teach* his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Him from the least to the greatest." Surely that expression "*no more*" is equivalent to saying that that is what every Christian is *expected to be doing now*. Yet, practically, most Christians seem to live as if that day had already come! Does not this explain to me the deadness of the Church, as well as the darkness of the world?

How many a once-illuminated soul has to admit that "its lamp has gone out"! Astronomers tell us of worlds that have lost their fires. They burned brightly once. Now they are cold and dark. Their very existence can only be known by a mathematical computation; for they are invisible to the eye. Many a Christian too has lost his light-giving power; and none but the Great Astronomer who numbereth the stars, can see him in His firmament at all. It was a solemn word my Master spoke when He said, "From him that hath not shall be taken away that which he hath," for one of the penalties of refusing service is to be denied opportunities for service afterwards.

It is strongly suggested by my Lord's question that the darkness which God means each enlightened soul to illuminate is the darkness *immediately surrounding itself*. He places His candlesticks just where He means His candles to shine. With the sphere of my work as a light-giver I have nothing to do. God arranges that. My business is simply to shine where I am. The light is needed everywhere; in the palace as much as in the hovel, in the homes of the rich as well as in the cottages of the poor, in schools of the cultured as well as where ignorance is dense. Thank God, He has lighted candles in all sorts of positions, both lofty and low: and where each is, there He means it to shine, illuminating the

darkness *round itself*. The glowworm that burns its feeble lamp among the grass is doing God's will as truly as the star that hangs its lantern in the sky: and he whose holy, sweet, consistent life makes him the light of his own humble home is doing there a work of which an angel might be proud, in which the loftiest of seraphim would count it an honour to be employed. The light that burns at the Goodwin Sands is not seen at Land's End—and does not need to be; but it serves its own purpose where it is. I need not complain because my light is so feeble that it cannot send its radiance to Africa or China or Japan. To light a much smaller area than that is all that may be required of me to my dying day. I have to make it my business to be steady in such shining as my Master calls me to, and leave the rest to Him. If He wants me some day to enlighten Africa, He will have a candlestick ready there to set me on.

It seems further suggested here that this work of enlightening the world's darkness is *easy work*—to this extent, at least, that it requires no effort for a lighted lamp to shine. All that is needed is room for its beams to spread. "*Let your light shine,*" says the Master. It *will* shine if you only let it shine. Keep it trimmed, and *let* it shine—remove obstructions from before it, and *let* it shine. No matter, therefore, what the candlestick may be that holds the light: it may be a

very lofty one or very low ; it may be a very splendid one, or only of coarsest and commonest make ; but be it of brass or earthenware, of silver or of gold, that makes no difference to the light. A candle will not shine any better in a gold candlestick than in one of tin. If my light burns clear, it will shine with equal effect whether I am a Daniel in the palace or only a Mordecai at the gate.

Yet let me remember that the *kindling* of the light is only part of the work that needs to be done. The other part is the sustaining and *nourishing* of the light when kindled : and if the first part is God's, the second part is mine. The light that shines openly has to be nourished secretly : for it is by a secret process, a process which escapes the eye, that the flame draws up from the enclosing fat the fuel that feeds its life. The process is continuous, but it is secret all the time. If my light is to shine with steady lustre, glorifying Him who has enkindled it, it must be *fed continuously* out of the fulness of Christ. Much secret fellowship with God, much prayerful intercourse with Him, communication uninterrupted between my soul and heaven—nothing else than this will maintain my light, even though Christ Himself has kindled it. If the world ceases to know me as a bright disciple, I may depend upon it that the reason is that my private intercourse with Christ has been interrupted, or has

come to an end. To live *upon* Christ in secret is the only way to live *for* Christ in public. It is only in "the secret place of the Most High" that I can gain that fulness of grace which will keep my candle burning steady and clear. I must watch, therefore, lest by indolence, or negligence, or worldliness, my prayer-life become a fickle and inconstant thing, and so my candle burn too low to be of any use. I need to watch, too, lest I allow obstacles to get in the way of its light. The world cannot quench the flame; but I myself may hide it. False shame may hide it. Conformity to the fashion of the day may hide it. The fear of man may hide it. If I am to do all that my Lord expects me to do as a light of the world, I must be more consistent in my personal life and more bold in confessing Him before men. It must never be sufficient for me that my discipleship is known to *Him*. He wants it to be known "to all men" too. My Father in heaven is not to be the only one that sees my good works. He cannot be "glorified" unless men see them also. Let me watch against these hindrances to my shining, the worldliness, the fear, the shame, the false reserve that so often mar the testimony of my life, and seal my lips as well, keeping me silent when I ought to speak.

This question of my Master's may well go keenly home to my conscience when I ask myself honestly, "What man has ever felt the

gracious influence of *Christ*, from his intercourse with *me*? What unconverted friend have my character or words ever impressed? What sinful one have I ever sought to save? Men have gone to a lost eternity from my very door, men whom I recognised every day in the street, and I never warned or expostulated with them, because a cowardly reticence or a false propriety kept me dumb. Friends, dear and loved, have lived in close intimacy with me under my roof, and have now gone far from me to distant lands, or have crossed the boundary from which there is no return; and I never opened my heart to them or got them to open their hearts to me on the great matters of eternal importance to us both." I may well be ashamed to look my Master in the face as I tell Him this.

How shall I repair the wrong? How shall I become more truly a light to the darkened at my side? I need for this a closer fellowship of spirit with Christ Himself. I need to talk with Him and have Him talk to me as He did to the disciples on the Emmaus road, who said, "Did not our hearts *burn within us* as we listened to His voice?" Then, but only then, will I myself be "a *burning* and a shining light." I must know Him better, love Him more, be more concerned for His glory, more thoroughly in touch with Him as to the great purpose of my redeemed life, which is, to be a witness everywhere to Him who has redeemed me. Then

I shall shine for Him, and *my* light shall bear witness to His.

This shining will cost me something. All light means an expenditure of force. Both fat and wick must be consumed in burning. But can I grudge the expenditure? must I not rather glory in it, when, in proportion as I am expended in His service I am myself transfigured by the flame that consumes?

V

JUST ESTIMATES

“Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”—MATTHEW vii. 3.

THERE ought surely to be nothing very difficult in the exhibition of that generous and considerate spirit which this question of the Master’s shows to be the only right one for a Christian; but if it *were* exhibited always, what a mass of uncharitableness and censoriousness and bitterness would instantly disappear! There is hardly any one who is not ready enough to do the work of extracting motes from his brother’s eye; but if it should be suggested to him, in the mildest way, that it would be well to have the large beam extracted from his own eye first, that he may see to do it, he would resent the suggestion as an insult. But what the Master here says is that all censoriousness has its root in blindness. There is almost a touch of humorous sarcasm in His words, “Then shalt thou

see clearly to pull out the mote"; for it is only because we think ourselves irreproachable, or nearly so, that we are so hard upon the faults and deficiencies of others.

Here, then, my Master gives me what is really an axiom, or first principle, on Christian living. "Before you condemn your brother from the height of your own rectitude, look narrowly into yourself; do not loftily condemn any man unless you have a keen sense of your own liability to err, either in the same way as he, or in some other way equally abhorrent to the purity of God: and remember that the same charity you are asked to show will be needed for yourself." What has been called the Golden Rule is, "Do unto others as you wish *others* to do to you." But another rule, equally golden and equally divine, is this, Do unto others as you would have *God* do to you. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive you your trespasses."

The doctrine of human depravity is sometimes called a cruel doctrine. So far from that, the whole beautiful edifice of Christian charity is built upon the recognition of it. For if I set out with assuming that all men are naturally good, and that right living is easy, and then demand that they shall always act in accordance with that assumption, my judgments of them are sure to be unjust and hard. But if I begin by remembering the taint of evil that infects us all, that all are

weakened and debased by tendencies inherent in them, and then make up my mind to treat them in accordance with that fact, I lay at once a foundation for all that is generous as well as just in my estimate of their faults. I treat children tenderly *because* they are children. I treat the sick with greater forbearance than the strong *because* they are sick. I put myself willingly out of the way of the blind, the deaf, the lame, *because* these infirmities appeal to my magnanimity. If I expand that rule till it covers moral weaknesses as well as spiritual ones, I lay the foundation of a charity wide and tender as that of God Himself.

There is a mighty difference between the way in which I am at liberty to deal with *sin* and the way in which I must deal with the *sinner* who falls into the sin. I may strike as hard as I please when denouncing the sin; but when the thing I am dealing with is a sensitive, human heart, my stroke must have more than faithfulness in it. It must have tenderness as well. For any one who has fallen low, the way back to uprightness is steep enough. I need not, by hard reproaches, make it perpendicular.

Then, too, I am to bear in mind the constitutional differences between different men. We do not all see alike, nor feel alike. Our mental habits and our passions are not all alike. We are all temptable, but not all temptable in the same way. The sins of one are not the sins of another. Some

are, by temperament, cold and passionless ; others, also by temperament, fiery, impulsive, hot. The special sins of some men are sins of "the flesh" ; of others, sins of "the spirit." We have all our characteristic sins ; and it is by no means true that those forms of sin which the world agrees to condemn are worse in the eyes of the Holy One than those which it never visits with its condemnation at all. I cannot be *just* in my estimates of men unless I estimate by a divine, and not merely a human, rule.

I am to treat men, too, not according to what they might be, but according to what they *are* ; and in condemning them for what they are, I must ask how they have *become* what they are. Have they not been subjected to evil influences that never surrounded me ? Have they not been assailed by temptations from which God's mercy has kept me free ? And am I sure that even while I condemn them, they may not be "repenting in dust and ashes" ? I dare not forget that Christ my Lord, the Infinite Pity, Himself declared that some of the most degraded upon earth may be, in a self-abasement known only to Him, nearer the Kingdom of God than those who, in a self-righteous pride of purity, look down upon them with contempt. I see the fallen only as they now are. The previous causes that made them what they are I seldom know. There are men whose virtues are really more the result of good early

training, good surroundings, and good health, than of any careful determination to do the right; and there are other men whose failings are due more to evil education, vicious surroundings, poverty, and bad health, than to any determined love of sin. There are in some men Christian excellences which it cost them almost no trouble to attain, for these are simply the fruit of a disposition naturally sweet. There are in others blots and disfigurements of character which are due chiefly to some diseased heredity, against which they may be struggling more faithfully than I know; for it is only the *unsuccessful* struggles which I see. There may thus be far more of the grace of God in some very imperfect men than there is in others beside them who appear to be much better Christians. It is strange how little I can know of the daily struggle with evil that is going on in the breasts of some of my closest friends; and stranger still that, knowing so little, I can be so harsh and unfeeling in my judgments of them as I sometimes am.

A very large proportion of the heart-burnings that often separate chief friends come, not from real injuries done on either side, but from the imagination and imputation of evil where no evil was meant. The origin of many a long-standing strife can be traced to no higher or worthier source than this, an appearance of evil on one side and an uncharitable judgment on the other. The

sensitive spirit was wounded by some omission of usual civilities, some reported fragment of conversation, some harmless little pleasantry or jest, some incident that looked like a studied affront. The slight "appearance of evil" was magnified till it wore the aspect of a deliberate insult; and so an estrangement began and lasted for years, the innocent cause of it being all the time completely unable to say why it should have lasted for a single day. The evil of this is great. The sin of it is great. It stands among the "works of the flesh" under the title "evil surmisings"; and it is emphatically condemned by Christ, who said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged": for the man who suspects every one else is generally to be suspected himself. That accurate knowledge of human nature on which he prides himself, and on which he grounds his suspicions, has generally been gained at home. The sins he sees are like his own reflection in a glass.

I am sure there must be a great deal more of righteousness, and striving after righteousness, in the world than I sometimes dream. I too easily take it for granted that everywhere the devil is king. I forget that, even in dens of ignorance and vice, God knows of many in whose hearts there is a great disgust at sin, and great longings for the purity that is so hard to reach. Abraham, on entering Gerar, among the Philistines, said, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place." It was a grievous

mistake. The true "fear of God" was at that moment not in Abraham, but in Abimelech, whom he thought a heathen out and out. It was Abimelech who played the part of a thoroughly upright man. It was he who was a child of the light. Abraham was for the moment a child of the darkness, and proudly condemned, without a hearing, a better man than himself.

I am not, as sometimes advised, to "err on the side of charity," for I am not to "*err*" in anything. The teaching of my Master is not "be indifferent to other men's faults, for all men are much the same." I am to be *just* as well as *generous*. But if I always judge in charity I shall not err. True Christian charity is often, like Mahomet's road to Paradise, a narrow knife-edge keen as a sword-blade; and this narrow edge has the yawning precipice of bigotry on the one side and of indifference upon the other. I must not fall *into either*: and therefore when I do discover some mote in my brother's eye I will look humbly for the beam that may be in my own; and remembering that those whom I most sternly judge may, at that very moment, be more sternly judging themselves, I will try to learn from my Master that Divine charity of which He Himself was the finest example; I will learn from Him to play more nobly than did the elder son in His parable the elder brother's part.

VI

AN INFALLIBLE TEST

“Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”—MATTHEW vii. 16.

WHAT an attentive reader of nature my Master always was! What open eyes He had for the Father's teaching in it! What a deep significance He found in common things! How clearly the Father's works spoke to Him of that Father's righteousness, as well as of the Father's love! He drew comfort to Himself, as well as gave comfort to others, by His tender way of looking at the lilies and the birds. I might be holier and happier too if I resembled Him more in this. All nature should speak to me as it spoke to Him. He has already made nature read me a beautiful lesson of *trust*: now He makes it read to me a lesson of *wise discrimination*. In this far-reaching question of His, He is teaching me how to judge of many things that perplex me, through the

difficulty of separating truth from error and of deciding whether some special thing is right or wrong. He tells me to decide the matter by noting the effect which it produces. That cannot be a bad thing the fruit of which is always good. That cannot be a good thing the natural fruit of which is evil. Let me look at the world, and at my own life in the world, and judge of both by this infallible test.

Let me think of the folly of expecting sweet and wholesome fruit from trees that cannot, by any possibility, produce it. I am making plans for my future, perhaps starting in the world; and I have some great ambitions which I would fain see realised. I am planning for the finest grapes: let me look well, then, to the kind of trees I am planting. Am I planting thorns in the hope that they will yield me by and by the sweet clusters I am longing for? It is only the devil who promises grapes from thorns: and he has never yet fulfilled that promise to any man, and never can.

My Master does not say, "Do men *expect* to gather grapes from thorns?" for He knew well that, strange as it seems, that is exactly what thousands do expect. His question is, "Do they ever *succeed* in finding them?" The thorn-bushes of dishonesty, trickery, self-indulgent vice, and other sorts, are planted thick in their life-field; and they calculate confidently on seeing sweet fruit hanging on them ere long. They do not *call*

them thorns. They give them some other and finer name, which hides their real character. In the new catalogues of moral horticulturists the plants are vaunted as not being the old hurtful sorts, but shrubs entirely different; and the ignorant, foolish heart is beguiled into the idea that the old-fashioned laws of God have been changed, in these later scientific days, for something better. Yet the old unanswerable question still remains to be faced, "Do these trees, call them by what name you will, ever really give you grapes, or reward you for the trouble of planting them?"

My own experience can surely confirm my Master here. Many a time I have planted in my life-garden what I thought would turn out to be good fruit-bearing trees, and to my shame and sorrow I found them to be thorns and nothing else. Sin often promised me much, but it always deceived me. "I sinned, and it profited me not." Look back as far as I may, I cannot point to even one sinful act or habit that ever did me good. What pleasure may have been in it for the moment was always followed by keener pain; and since I have known some of the sweet satisfactions of righteousness, the joys of the pure in heart, the peace that fills a soul renewed, I can only ask myself, in amazement at my former blindness and folly, "What fruit had I *then* in those things of which I am *now* ashamed?" Let me listen to my Master,

and listen also to my own memory which says Amen to all my Master's words.

And if, as may be the case, I am perplexed by the fact that all my endeavours to live rightly so continually fail, let me honestly ask if the reason for that fact be not this : that the tree itself is not good, else the fruit would be good ; that the defect is not in my efforts, but in the very nature that puts the efforts forth ; that I have not, what I must have if my efforts are to be successful, a renewed nature to begin with ? For all my strivings to live according to godliness, *before* I am thoroughly changed in my whole spirit and mind and feelings by the grace of God, will only be efforts to *hang* good fruit on branches whereon they never *grew*.

But I have here a test for trying other things than my own personal life. My Master's question helps me much when I am perplexed by the constant attacks made upon my Christian faith, and things which, from the beginning, have been dear to Christian men. I hold, with the Church of all the ages, that the Scriptures are the Word of God, but I am staggered sometimes in my faith by the confident attacks that are made upon them ; I am told that I am quite behind the times, and that my old-fashioned beliefs are now exploded for ever. Well, I have only to think of all that this Word of God has done for the regenerating, the uplifting, the sweetening of the world wherever its holy

influence has been allowed free play. I have only to think of how it has been an enlightener of ignorance, a rebuker of sin, a healer of corruption, a deliverer of the oppressed, an uplifter of the degraded, a guide to the wanderer, a help to the weary, a comforter to the sad. I have only to remember how it has been God's message of highest love to men, speaking of salvation to the sinful, of peace to the tried, of hope to the despairing, of life to the dying, of heaven to the bereaved. I have only to think of all this, and ask how that can possibly be a bad tree that has always yielded fruit so sweet.

If I am perplexed with arguments tending to overthrow the sacredness of the Sabbath Day, I think of the beautiful clusters of ripe fruit that are gathered from it by every one who has it growing in the midst of his worries and his cares; and I say confidently, That tree is good.

I hear ridicule poured upon missions to heathen lands. They are condemned as useless, and even hurtful to the "child of nature," the picturesque and happy savage. I am told that Hinduism is as good a religion for India as Christianity is for me; that Buddhism is quite sufficient for all the spiritual needs of Mongolia and Thibet; that Confucianism is for a Chinaman a better guide than the precepts of Jesus Christ; that Moham-medanism is as good for the Arab and Turk as my own religion is for those that live under western

skies ; and my answer needs only to be this practical one, "by their fruits ye shall know them." I see the kind of fruit brought forth by these religions, and I see how unspeakably bad it is. My answer to those who praise Hinduism is simply "India !" My answer to those who extol Buddhism or Confucianism is "China !" My reply to the apologist for Mohammedanism is "Africa !" By their fruits of evil I judge them all.

There are things at home too which sometimes perplex me not a little. What am I to say about the rightness or wrongness of much that seems clearly opposed to the mind of Christ, and yet is not only tolerated but approved by large numbers who bear His name ? What is to be my judgment, for example, about the theatre ? I need nothing else to test it by, than the fruit it has always brought forth. It is defended as a great "school of morals" ; but if so, I ask how it has been condemned, by the wisest and best of every age, as immoral in its effects ; not by Christians only, but by heathen themselves. I ask how it is that the "teachers of morality" on the stage are never found taking part in more evident means of promoting morality *off* the stage ; how the theatre has always so strong an attraction for the worst classes of every community ; how the most corrupt and profligate find there a congenial home ; how so many have dated their life-ruin from their first entrance into this "school of morals" ; and how

it comes to pass that every theatre-lover who becomes a converted man and an earnest Christian immediately gives it up? History tells me, the confessions of its own votaries tell me, my own observation tells me, that its fruit is always evil; and I will not call by the name of grapes what grows upon so rank a thorn-tree as that. In this case, and in a hundred more, the Master's incisive question helps me out of more difficulties than I could believe.

Yet let me learn one thing more. I cannot help thinking that in my Lord's own divine husbandry of the soul there *is* such a thing as making me to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles. He finds it necessary sometimes to punish my waywardness by doing to me what Gideon did, when he "taught the men of Succoth with thorns and briars"; but His sorest chastenings of my pride and foolishness yield such fruit of righteous holiness, when I am "exercised thereby," as to become blessings in disguise. No thorns planted by my own hands can ever yield me good. But the Lord can use them in a different way; to scourge me with when I rebel: and then "His chastenings serve to cure the soul by salutary pain." I have sometimes already got blessing out of my own thorns in this strange way. If He will bring me more of it yet in the same way, till I am wholly His, I will only praise His name.

VII

SAVOURLESS SALT

“ Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? ”—MATTHEW v. 13.

MY Lord tells me, in this striking way, how great a privilege is given me ; and also how terribly I may fail of being what He expects me to be. The world is corrupt ; not one part of it only, but all ; and I am to be in it as a purifying power. I am to make my contact with the world a sanctifying thing. My quiet, noiseless influence is to be a pungent, penetrating influence for good on every part of its complex life which I touch.

I am reminded by this that if I am to be a healer of the world's corruption I must myself be different from the world, myself renewed divinely in spirit and in aim. What heals corruption must be entirely different from, and opposite to, the corruption which it seeks to heal. I must have not merely a better form of the world's life, but a divine life. Have I this ?

Then, next, I am reminded that if God has put His divine life into me, it is that He may use me to communicate life. I am called to be a "saint": that my saintliness may make some others a little more saintly too. He works *in* me first, but only that He may work *by* me next. I am to be His willing servant to promote the righteousness of His kingdom in other souls. But He warns me faithfully that my salt may lose its savour, and so my power to influence the world for good may pass completely away. Let me ask myself if this deteriorating process may not be already begun, or even be far advanced towards loss irreparable. Let me, with a jealous fear of savourlessness, look well to my own spiritual life.

For the beginning of the loss is sure to be found in the carelessness of my own personal walk with God. If, on an honest review, I am forced to feel that I have declined in my spiritual *force*, I am sure to find the secret of that decline in another and more private one which has been going on perhaps for long, a decline in the fervour of my own heart-fellowship with Christ. If I have to confess that my zeal for my Master is not so intense as it used to be, that my love to Him prompts me to less than it once did, that my conscience is not so keen and fresh as once it was, that my whole spiritual vision is now very dim; I may easily discover the reason. It is because I have now far less delight in secret prayer than I had in earlier

days. I do not read the Bible now with the old hunger for heavenly food. I do not read it with the same delight, or reverence, or insight, or submissiveness of spirit. I have grown greatly "out of touch" with God; and so, though I still keep far away from any participation in the ways of vice, the world's sin does not move me to pity or to prayer or to effort as once it did. I still use all the accustomed forms of Christian speech, but without much fervour of heart. I still hold to the saving truth; but it is dimmer and hazier to me than once it was. I stand for all the doctrines of the faith as much as ever; but there is no joyous ring in the tone with which I utter or defend them. Though I can argue for them as before, the warmth of them is gone. My intellect may be as clear as a frosty night, but my heart is just as cold.

If I wonder how this *can* come to pass in any Christian life, my Master hints at the cause of it in His metaphor, the salt. If salt ever loses its savour, *the loss is due to outside influences*. It would remain for millenniums with all its inherent qualities unimpaired, if it were not exposed to sun and rain, or to the dampness of the cellar in which it lies. My Lord would thus suggest to me that my chief danger is that the subtle influences of the world around me may affect me gradually till they have robbed me of all my power for Him. The influence of *my social world* may affect me thus. It beckons me to share its pleasures. I go

into them at first with a secret repugnance to much that I see. Soon I will go without any repugnance at all. The good opinion of my little world will gradually be more attractive to me than the approval of my Master ; and I will compromise my allegiance to *Him* for the sake of standing well with *it*. I will become a casuist before I know, saying to myself that it is good to make the Christian discipleship as attractive to the world as I can, and that, for that purpose, I must meet the world half way. I promise my remonstrating conscience to use for Christ the influence I thus may gain over unchristian friends. I flatter myself that I will take the world by the hand and lead it back to Him. But soon I too surely find that the drag is all the other way. I do not gain the world, but the world gains me ; till at last I dare not open my mouth to speak of my Master at all. If I did, I would be met with its contempt for my inconsistency. The world would do with me what it does with savourless salt, "trample it under-foot."

The influences of *the intellectual world* may also affect me injuriously. I may "lose my savour" through the action upon me of that subtle but strong force which is called "the spirit of the age," the general trend of cultured thought which surrounds me like an atmosphere from which I cannot get away. When I hear a sceptical science boasting that it has destroyed all common religious beliefs ;

when I hear doubts cast upon everything that I have been accustomed to accept as the truth of God; when they meet me in the literature I daily read; when my newspaper is full of them; when I hear them even from the pulpit on the lips of professed servants of Christ; I can hardly escape a certain cooling of my faith at least: or, if faith still survives, I am tempted to hide it lest I should be thought to be "behind the age." I may still, in spite of all objectors, believe in the value of prayer; but I do not pray with the same childlike simplicity and confidence in my Father as I used to do. I may still believe the Bible to be, in some limited sense, the very voice of God; but, after hearing it attacked on every side, even by men who profess to honour it, after being told that criticism has shown that it was not a supernatural gift, but only one of the world's many literary growths, with errors on nearly every page, its voice is not the same to me in tone or comfort or authority as it used to be. I have got into the damp, and my spiritual life is like salt that has lost its savour. Let my Master's question, then, come closely home to me, ere this degeneration of my life ends in utter loss.

Still further, it is suggested to me by this metaphor that, as salt, however pure and pungent, can do no good unless it is brought into actual contact with corruption, I am not to content myself with sitting apart and lamenting the evil

of the world, or with shutting myself up in a secluded sanctity, leaving the world to its doom. I am to see that my salt really touches the evil that is round about me. How is it, then, with my Christian influence over what is nearest to me—my own friends, my own family-circle, my own home? Does it hallow everything there, or try to do it? How about my children: their food and drink and dress; the kind of education I am giving them; the kind of companionships I allow them to form; the kind of books I allow them to read; the kind of places I allow them to frequent; the kind of amusements I encourage them in;—am I training them for *the world*, and according to the maxims of the world? or for *Christ*, and according to *His* maxims and His law?

How about my friends? Can they see so much of the Christ-spirit in me that they feel my presence to be a really sanctifying force? Surely it is worth a great deal for me so to live as to get my Master better loved and served by even one single soul. Am I doing this? Let me take heed lest, while the world praises me because I do not disturb it, my Master should condemn me for unfaithfulness to Him; and lest, though saved myself, I should be saved only as one drawn out of the fire, barely escaping with life, and having no “works to follow” me, far less to accompany me; receiving no honour or reward at the Master’s hands.

The great need of the day is not so much of

earnest evangelists to preach the gospel by their lips as of earnest Christians to preach it by their lives ; for the world is far from being a holy world, only because the followers of a holy Christ are so far from being sufficiently holy men and women. The quiet influence of a sanctified life will often do more good than a hundred sermons. Every lover of music knows Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words." My life as a Christian is to be a "sermon without words." I may put Bible texts upon the walls of my house, or have them lying, beautifully illuminated, between the pages of my devotional books ; but if my whole daily life were manifestly a following of my Lord, I would make *myself* a text for other eyes to read ; a far more effective way, after all, of showing to every friend and visitor "whose I am and whom I serve." I would seek to be not merely a Naphtali, "giving goodly words," but a Joseph, "a fruitful bough, whose branches *go over the wall.*"

VIII

NOT FEAR, BUT TRUST

"Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?"—MATTHEW viii. 26.

"Where is your faith?"—LUKE viii. 25.

"How is it that ye have no faith?"—MARK iv. 40.

"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"—MATTHEW xiv. 31.

OFTEN does my Master need to speak in this way to me. When I am confronted with some great difficulty from which I cannot extricate myself, or am involved in troubles for which I am not responsible, especially when they come upon me unexpectedly and suddenly, how easily I, too, lose faith in God, as if He were carelessly leaving me to perish. Yesterday, I was sitting on the quiet hillside, and there was not the faintest sign of coming storm. How happy and contented I was in the feeling of my Master's presence and the hearing of His voice! His great love seemed brooding over me, and I was resting under it, "quiet from the fear of evil." To-day, in the

wild storm that has burst upon me, yesterday's peace seems only a dream. I seem to have lost everything ; not only peace, but hope as well ; not only hope, but my very faith itself. I have still my Master with me, but the calmness of my trust in Him is gone. I almost accuse Him of forgetting me, and I think, "What can even He do for me if He is asleep?"

I had seen enough of His power and love at other times to banish every fear, and when He put His "new song into my lips" I felt as if I never could distrust Him for a moment, come what might. But the sudden whirlwind shattered into fragments that poor faith of mine that seemed so strong. I never knew how poor it was till it was tested by this storm ; and now I hear my Lord rebuking me for my faithlessness, wondering at it while He rebukes it, saying, "Where is your faith?" He expected better things than this from me. I have disappointed Him ; I have wounded Him by my unbelief. "You could trust Me," He says, "when all was bright, but you cannot trust Me when the first darkness falls." It goes to His heart to find me such a poor disciple.

This failure of my faith, just when I need it most, shows me that I have never yet taken firm enough hold of His promises ; never looked deep enough into His heart of love ; never realised enough the power of His glorious hand ; never given Him full credit for being what He assured

me He would be. What I called my faith in brighter times was not really faith at all, but only that vague happiness that is born of sunshine, and dies the moment the sun has set and chill darkness falls.

How very glibly I have sometimes talked of "walking by faith and not by sight," as if it were the easiest of all things, the very alphabet of Christian experience, a sort of spiritual truism; instead of being, as it really is, one of the last and highest of spiritual attainments, a thing that can be learned only through long training and at great cost. It is very easy to go on rejoicingly with God when He, every moment, makes the smoothest of pathways for my feet; opening Red Seas by miracle as soon as I reach them; sending manna from heaven as soon as I am hungry; making the hard rock yield me a gushing stream as soon as I faint with thirst. But when I "see not my signs," when He gives me none of these tokens of His care, but rather leaves me purposely without them to find what manner of spirit I am of, still to go on as happily as if I saw them all—still to believe the love that hides itself, still to trust where I cannot understand—that is the only faith worth anything, the only faith that "overcomes." "Little Faith" may be a sincere enough disciple, but he is always an unhappy and discouraged one. "Great Faith" is a prince with God, a conqueror not only over sin, but over fear.

The Master seems to teach me by these storms on the lake, that the sore troubles that break over my life do not always, or often, come as *punishments* for some sin, but rather as *discipline* for the deepening of my trust. The disciples were surprised by sudden storms when they were in the way of duty, simply obeying the Master's command to cross the lake; and that fact seems to say to me, "Do not argue that, when some very sore and unlooked-for trial comes on *you*—in your body, your home, your business, your reputation, or whatever else—you must have been somehow grieving your Lord and compelling Him thus to chastise you. It need not be a punishment, but only one of His strange ways of raising you to a higher conception of Him, and to a nobler faith. *This* sevenfold heated furnace is not kindled by "the wrath of the King," but by His love; and the meaning of it will be clear when the faith that has endured it is purified by means of it, and shines out a finer faith than it was before. Some one has said that "Providence, like Hebrew, needs to be read *backwards*." It is the end that explains the beginning. I can wait for God's explanations till heaven comes; meanwhile, "I will trust, and not be afraid."

Looking at that second storm, where Peter's faith and fear were both called out, the one by the Master, the other by the waves, it gladdens me to see that the Lord did not *rebuke* His trembling

disciple till He had *saved* him first, and that He laid hold of Peter before Peter could lay hold of Him. It is always so. It is the Lord who begins, as well as completes, the saving work. I do, and must, cling firmly to my Deliverer's hand; still, my security lies not in my grasp of Him, but in His grasp of me. My grasp, however firm, may soon relax; but His hand is never weary and never weak. In that my safety lies.

I think, too, with joy, of the exceeding tenderness of the Master's rebuke when at last He uttered it. He did not say, "Wherefore didst thou *come*, if thy faith could not hold out?" He only says, "Wherefore didst thou *doubt*?" The Lord of the soul never says to any man, "You have trusted Me too much." He did not say to Peter, "O thou of *no* faith," only "O thou of little faith," for He saw some faith there; and though a strong faith wins His strong encomium, even a weak faith gladdens His heart. Still, weak faith misses much that great faith always enjoys. John Bunyan, in his inimitable "Pilgrim's Progress," pictures many varieties of little faith. Besides "Little Faith" himself, there is "Ready-to-halt," and "Feeble-mind," and "Fearing," and "Despondency," and "Much-afraid." He has given so many portraits of that family just because the family is so large, and some of them are to be met with almost everywhere; and though they all got into the Celestial City at the end, they suffered

terribly by the way, from obstacles that a stronger faith would have easily overcome. "Great Faith" lives in the tropics, and has a perpetual summer; "Little Faith's" years are like Norwegian years—very short summers and very long winters; his harvests can hardly be reaped, the storms are wild, and his music is chiefly in the minor key. Surely *little* faith is not what might be expected from one who has so *great* a Lord! There is such an infinity of grace and power in Him, that He expects the heart that trusts Him at all to trust Him to the uttermost; at least, His blessed way of lifting me out of all my discouragements is this—a loving whisper, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?"

When I see my Master, as I hope to do, in the land beyond the sea, and begin to recount, as I am sure to do, the wonders of His love to me when I was crossing to it, when I "praise Him with unsinning heart," and tell Him that the most wonderful of all surprises is just to find myself in heaven beside Him after all, a heaven I sometimes hardly hoped to see, I think He will have nothing to say to me but this, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? Was I not well able to keep My promises to thee? *Wherefore didst thou doubt?* Has not all the darkness passed, as I said it would? *Wherefore didst thou doubt?* Did I not tell thee that 'My sheep can never perish?' *Wherefore didst thou doubt?* Has

not death itself been made to thee the gate of heaven, as I said it would? *Wherefore didst thou doubt?* Am I not proving to thee here, in the glory and the gladness, proving to thee for the thousandth time, that ‘him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out?’ *Wherefore didst thou doubt?* Dost thou not *now* see that all the paths of the Lord were mercy and truth? *O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*” If this will really be my gracious Saviour’s love-welcome to me at the last, and if all my doubts of Him *will* end on the other shore, I will try to end them even here, and say, as I look straight to His blessed face, “Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.”

“When I in darkness walk,
Nor feel the heavenly flame,
Then is the time to trust my God,
And rest upon His name.

Soon shall my doubts and fears
Subside at His control,
His loving-kindness shall break through
The midnight of the soul.

Blest is the man, O God,
That stays himself on Thee;
Who wait for Thy Salvation, Lord,
Shall Thy salvation see.”

IX

THE NICKNAMED CHRIST

“If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?”—MATTHEW x. 25.

THIS question comforts me. It even ennobles me. To be a sharer in “the reproach of Christ”—what greater honour could fall to me on earth than that? This carrying of my Master’s cross is a link between me and Him. I have sometimes almost envied Simon the Cyrenian his privilege of helping to carry the actual cross on the way to Calvary: but I see that it is given to me to “take up the cross daily” and carry it after Him, “so filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ”; and I envy Simon no more. What he did *once* I can do *every day*.

What scandalous misrepresentations my Lord had to endure, not merely from His angry and contemptuous foes, but even from His well-meaning friends! I recall how, once, His own mother and

His brethren, unable to understand His absorbing devotion to His Father's work, afraid that He was killing Himself by His protracted labours of love, and fearing that He was exposing Himself to danger from plots devised to take away His life, sought to "lay hands on Him," and hurry Him away into a place of safety, saying, "He is beside Himself." They wanted to shield Him from violence by the cruel suggestion that He was not responsible for His acts! "He is in league with Beelzebub," said the Pharisees. "No," said His friends, "but His strange ways of acting, so unlike those of any other Rabbi in the land, show that He is not quite Himself!" How much my Lord had to endure from blinded men! The Incarnate Wisdom was defended from the charge of being a demoniac by the excuse that He was a lunatic!

If I am faithfully following in my Master's steps, I will sometimes have similar misrepresentation to meet; but I may console myself by remembering that "it is enough for the disciple to be as his Lord." Neither Christ nor Christ-like men can have much of popularity in a world that despises both; and the more closely I tread in my Master's footprints, the less of this popularity will I share. If true to my Lord, I must *expect* the hatred of "the world," and not be disconcerted when it comes. Sometimes an inexperienced Christian is alarmed at it. Called suddenly to oppose the world, after having been long sheltered in the safe

rest of a Christian home, the intense hatred and scorn which a decided stand for Christ calls forth comes upon him as an unwelcome surprise, and he either falls before it, or wonders that a Master who said, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light," gives him so heavy a cross to bear. Something of this sort may fall to my lot soon. Let me fortify myself beforehand by considering how *helpful* the opposition of the world may prove to be.

For one thing, it will help me *to realise more distinctly that I belong to Christ*. It will only assure me that I *am* of the Master's "household": for if I were not, the world would let me alone. So if I am not spared the *pain* of the cross, I am not denied the *blessing* of it either.

For another, it will make my separateness from the world *more clear to others* as well as to myself. Whenever I find that completely worldly men delight in my society, and that I delight in theirs, I need no other proof of the unsatisfactory character of my own spiritual life. The discipleship of an unworldly Christ must be a Church Militant, not a Church Quiescent; and so long as it is so, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution."

No doubt the timid, indolent, self-seeking, time-serving disciple, who is silent in the presence of sin, who never disturbs the composure of the world by word or act, who never by his own godliness

of life condemns the world, will be not only unmolested, but even praised as a beautiful specimen of what a charitable, tolerant, broad-minded Christian ought to be! But true "witnesses" for God's righteousness the world cannot endure to-day, any more than it could endure the Supreme Witness nineteen centuries ago. It will persecute them now just as it did then; if not with material fire and sword, at least with weapons quite as keen, and whose wounds go deeper far—with slander and scorn and ridicule and that quiet, contemptuous, social ostracism which, to many sensitive hearts, is the hardest thing of all to bear.

If I do not earn, to some extent, the same opprobrium that bespattered my Lord, I may well begin to ask myself whether my discipleship is so bold and thorough-going as He expects it to be. The world likes best a religion that has its claws cut and its teeth drawn; that is simply ornamental, and offends nobody. But if my religion is one that gets the praise of completely unsanctified men, because, as they say, it is so reasonable and sane and moderate, always "kept in its proper place," never making any protest against iniquity and wrong; I may surely ask myself, with serious concern, whether that is the kind of religion under the power of which *my Master* lived and died, or the kind of religion that should satisfy *me* as His disciple. Rather let me count it an honour to be

nicknamed "*puritanical*" because I cannot stoop to the level of those whose only notion of "pleasure" is utter frivolity or vice, whose only idea of "liberty" is unbridled license to sin. Let me pray, with deepest earnestness, that my Lord may never need to say to *me*, "the world cannot hate *you*, but Me it hateth, because I testify of it that its deeds are evil."

Still, let me remember that the comfort of my Master's words belongs to me only if the hatred of the world which I endure is really a hatred of my godly uprightness; if, when I am "persecuted," it is really "*for my righteousness' sake*." For a disciple of Christ may be disliked by the world on quite other grounds than that. There may be something in his bearing which needlessly exasperates men, instead of conciliating them. In the tone with which he rebukes sin there may be, consciously or unconsciously, an arrogance which destroys the power of his rebuke. Some foolish utterances of his own he may insist upon being received as the very truth of God; or his arguments in support of the truth may be absurd and weak; and opposition to him excited by such defects as these he must not call opposition to God. He may be disliked and hated for some glaring faults in his own character, and not "for Christ's sake" at all. Not every *earnest* Christian is *wise*. Even thoroughly genuine men may so act that "their good comes to be evil spoken of."

It is needful, therefore, before claiming for myself the comfort of this word of my Master's, to be well assured that it is really *His* reproach I bear; that I am carrying *His* cross, and not merely one of my own making. But if I am "reproached for the name of Christ, happy am I: the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon me, and He is glorified."

One other thought suggests itself. The men that sneered at Christ have ceased their sneering long ago, and never will sneer again. The Christ they mocked came forth from that fire unharmed, and has been for long centuries on the throne of heaven where angels worship Him and saints adore. If my cross be heavy, I have not very far to carry it: and five minutes of heaven will more than compensate all. "*Christ and His cross*," said Samuel Rutherford, "go hand in hand to heaven's gate, but they part company for ever at that door: within the gate are only *Christ and His glory*." To carry my Master's reproach for a few short years is all He asks, and He will repay me with everlasting honour. Surely the carrying it may be my joy! It has been beautifully said regarding Simon the Cyrenian, who carried with Christ the heavy cross of wood, that when he began that walk along the Via Dolorosa he could have told to a pound the weight he had to lift; but ere he had finished the journey to Calvary, he had forgotten that there was a cross upon his back at all. If I bear the Master's cross

unwillingly, I will talk plenty about my "sore affliction"; but if, by companying with Him, I catch something of His Spirit, know something of His grace, and see something of His glory, I will forget my own pain, and only rejoice in the privilege of suffering "with Him."

Oh the sorrow of it, that I have borne so little for Him who bore so much for me! Let me stir myself up to a truer discipleship: and then—

"If on my head for Thy dear name
Shame and reproach shall be,
I'll hail reproach and welcome shame,
If Thou remember me."

X

DULL MINDS AND MEMORIES

"Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? . . . and when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? . . . How is it that ye do not understand?"—MARK viii. 17-21.

"Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?"—MARK iv. 13.

"Are ye also yet without understanding?"—MATTHEW xv. 16.

THE great Master had to suffer not only from "the contradiction of sinners," but from the obtuseness of His own disciples. And yet how gently He dealt with both! If I am sometimes irritated by slowness of comprehension in those I am seeking to lead into truth, let me think how patiently *He* dealt with those He had been teaching for more than eighteen months, and seemingly in vain. He was *grieved* with their obtuseness and forgetfulness; one might say He was *dis-*

appointed with it; but He was not *angry*. He did not give up the work in disgust or despair. He quietly taught them for the twentieth time, what they had not taken in at any of the previous nineteen. Still, there was something pathetic in His rebuke. It saddened Him to see that they could not understand the simplest forms of His teaching, and could not rise above the lowest level of thought. "Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Do ye not remember?" They could not profit by a wonderful past. They seemed not able to use their eyes and their ears. His *nine consecutive questions* about the miracles and the loaves showed how accurately *He* remembered all. He could recall the smallest details; the varying numbers of the people that were fed; the varying numbers of the loaves and fishes; the two different kinds of baskets; and the differing number of baskets, proportioned to their size. No detail had faded from *His* recollection. Why should all have made so small an impression upon *them*? Why, above all, should they imagine that *He* was always troubling Himself about the small earthly matters that troubled *them*? Would they never rise to His level of concern, to His absorption with great spiritual realities, instead of living so far down among merely material ones? And again, would they never come to see that to Him the inward was infinitely more than the outward? that what *He* looked chiefly at was not the washing of the

hands but the cleansing of the soul? "Are ye also yet without understanding as to *this*?" He says. Was their unworldly, heavenly-minded Master a complete enigma to them still, after all these months?

But am I so very different from these disciples? Does He find no blind eye or deaf ear—no dulness of memory and understanding in *me*? For many long years He has been showing me the wonders of His love, and I see them not. He has been speaking to me with many a voice—sometimes sternly, sometimes encouragingly, sometimes warningly, always lovingly; and I hear Him not. When I am disheartened, I forget His power, and I forget my own experience of His power. I am worried and troubled, as if I had never known what it was to have Him supplying all my need. It is because I "do not remember" that I *doubt*; because I "do not remember" that I *sin*; because I "do not remember" that I *fear*. Each new emergency lands me in new perplexity, because I "do not remember." This is *my* great failing too. Must I not be grieving and disappointing my Master just as these disciples did?

But I must ponder His question about His *parable*, as well as these questions about the *miracles*. "Know ye not this parable?" He asks, "how then will ye understand others?" It was a very simple one, but they could not read it; and He says, with a sort of sadness in His tone, "how

can I teach you My deeper things, if this is too deep for you ? " Let me take home to myself the truth that, without a Divine illumination, even the simplest divine things will be only mysteries to me. All parables are pictorial illustrations of truth ; and it is often easier to understand a picture than the letterpress. But it is not *illustration* only that I need ; I need *illumination* too. If the Spirit of truth does not unfold the truth to me, I shall never see it. To the things of God even the most soaring genius may be completely blind ; its flashes of intuition, even, tell nothing. The sea of Divine truth is one whose shallows, equally with its depths, it cannot fathom of itself. " The natural man *receiveth not* the things of the Spirit of God." But more than that : " they are foolishness to him, *neither can he know them* ; for they are spiritually discerned." When I have difficulties about the interpretation of the Word, I will pray for this Divine illumination first of all. I will not ask the commentators what my Master means. I will go directly to the Author Himself ; and His promise to me is that I shall not go in vain. " The Spirit of truth," He says, " shall guide you into all the truth."

But in the last of these questions the Lord came even closer home to His disciples' hearts. There was another thing yet He wondered at : their slowness to understand that His kingdom's righteousness concerned itself more with inward purity

than with merely external obediences. When the formal, punctilious Pharisees rebuked them for eating with unwashed hands, and He defended them by expounding that the real purity was purity of heart, they could hardly take in a doctrine so revolutionary of all their accustomed modes of thinking; and the grieved Master had again to say to them, "Are ye so without understanding also?" "Do even ye not yet perceive that the real seat of evil is the evil heart, and that if the *heart* be not cleansed, all cleansing of the *hands* will go for nothing?" The scribes lived only upon ceremonies. Jesus lived upon Truth. That was the essential difference between Him and them; and it roused His righteous indignation that the leaders of the people, the scholars and the theologians of the day, were teaching others that religion consisted in a punctilious round of mean trivialities, that could be attractive only to the meanest souls.

I glory in having a Master who always looked beneath the surface, and brought Reality into view. He never attempted to "save appearances" at the expense of truth. He said "the kingdom of God is *within* you"; "what your hearts are, that you yourselves are, and only that." And I cannot but think how terribly, if He were visibly amongst us to-day, He would thunder upon the world these scorching exposures of His, and tell it that religion is not a poor affair of meats and drinks, of ritual

and music, and sacerdotal magic, nor even of almsgiving and benefactions and worship where worship is in the fashion; but of purity of soul, sanctity of life, and complete consecration to the will of God. "Washing your hands!" He would say, "as if that were enough, while, all the time, you are soaking your souls in secret pollution!" And how He would set fire, too, to those poor controversies that so often divide His Church: controversies about things as unimportant to its great mission as the washing of hands was to the service of God. Alas! how slow His disciples still are to learn that they cannot be on the way to the kingdom unless the Life of the kingdom be within them! and how many that would pass for Christians are strongly disinclined to seek that this kingdom's Life may be so fully in them as to be the great controlling force! When He asks them, "Wilt thou be made *whole*?" they say, "No—*somewhat better*, certainly, but not *completely whole*." Nothing would more utterly disconcert them than that Christ should set them *completely free from every kind of sin*! But if my worldliness is *soul-deep*, and my Christliness only *skin-deep*, the world may applaud me, but Christ will not own me for a day.

Do all disciples understand their Master even yet? Do *I* understand Him well enough to see that my chief concern every day must be to look to the state of my affections and desires, and that

my chief effort every day must be to be pure within ?

One other thought suggests itself to me—a very comforting one. Absolutely perfect is my Lord's knowledge of all the impurities, and lusts, and deceits, and falsities that lie concealed in every human heart ; and yet (wonder of wonders !) His knowledge of this dark and deep depravity does not chill His love. He knows the very worst about me ; He sees me to be inherently more vile than I ever saw myself to be ; He knows not only all I have been, and all I am, but all that I yet will show myself to be till sin is expelled from my heart for ever. And yet He undertakes to be my Redeemer from it all ! Only when I realise this blessed truth can I look my sins in the face, though humbled and broken-hearted because of them ; for then there comes to me the glad news of God, that “where sin aboundeth, grace aboundeth still more.”

XI

THE HIDING OF HIS POWER

“ How many loaves have ye ? ”—MATTHEW xv. 34.

“ Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat ? ”—JOHN vi. 5.

THE first thing I notice here is my Master's deep compassion for every human need; not for the highest only, but even for the lowest of all. “ Jesus moved with compassion ” is His enduring name; a name that explains His life, His teachings, and His death as well. It was out of compassion for the sinful, that He came; out of compassion for the ignorant, that He spoke; out of compassion for the sorrowful, that He wept; out of compassion for the wayward, that He rebuked; out of compassion for the sick, that He healed; out of compassion for the lost, that He died: and it is out of compassion for His weak and weary and tempted and discouraged brethren that He lives in heaven “ making intercession ” still. A *compassionate* Christ is the Christ I need. Even among earthly

friends the compassionate friend is the one that I need oftenest and need longest too. A *clever* friend suits me well enough now and then ; an *amusing* friend may be good for my lighter hours ; an *argumentative* friend may help me when perplexed. But all these fail me in my deepest needs ; they even become wearisome when my heart is sad. It is my Master's infinitely tender compassion for my wants, for my infirmities, for my temptations, and for my griefs, that attracts me to Him and binds me to Him most.

Here He was compassionating the *souls* of that great multitude, speaking to them His "wonderful words of life" ; but He was compassionating their *bodies* too, giving them His wonderful food from "a table in the wilderness." Let me seek to be like my Master in this, as in all things else. Carrying to these hungry ones the greatest of all messages, He yet remembered that they had nothing to eat : and the best sermon will fall flat on one who is perishing for lack of food. That cheap religion which leaves a tract at the door of the poor, where it ought, first of all, to have left a loaf of bread, or a sack of coal, was not my Master's religion. He was touched with a feeling of the infirmities of the starving as well as the sins of the lost.

There are philanthropists in plenty who go to the other extreme, quick to relieve the hungry or the sick, but with little or no sympathy for their

spiritual needs. Caring for the *body* they understand, but caring for the soul seems only waste of energy and time. These two kinds of philanthropists are often suspicious of each other. Each cries out that the other is working on wrong lines. It would be a dark day for the Divine kingdom in the world if the Church should forget that the spiritual needs of men are really the deepest and most pressing; but it too often lays itself open to the scorn of the world by forgetting what its Master did, and leaving to unchristian men the work of practical sympathy which ought to be dear to itself. There was really much force in the remark of the son of a very miserly Christian who *prayed* for the poor, "Father, I wish I had your meal-barrel, and then I would answer your own prayers."

But I see here more than my Lord's beautiful compassion: I see also *His bountiful hand*. I see the infinite resources of Divine Power that lay behind the tenderness of Divine Love. My own compassion, when it is deep, continually outruns my resources. I would help thousands: I can only help one or two. In Jesus Christ the resources were always equal to the compassion; and it was just His perfect consciousness of possessing these resources of secret power that kept Him calmly going with His higher work till the fit moment came for bringing them forth. It was not the Master, but the disciples, that first alluded to the

difficulty of providing food for that hungry multitude. They came to Him with a hint that He had been too absorbed in His spiritual work to note the lapse of time, and that really He ought to think of it, and send them away. So the disciples *seemed* to be more considerate than the Master was; but only because they did not know either His thoughts or the infinite reserves of His power. The utmost of their compassion was, "send them away to buy." He looked at them quietly, and said, "They need not depart; give ye them to eat." I would like to have seen their faces as He said that! They thought themselves extremely benevolent in making their little suggestion. All they got for it was a quiet rebuke for distrusting *Him*. Alas! how prone are all disciples still to come to the Lord with their poor suggestions, as if He needed to be reminded of what is the best thing for Him to do! Surely He knows well when the sun is going down and when hunger will become distress. Let me leave my Master to manage *everything* for me, knowing that He has the best of reasons for all He does and for all He seems forgetting to do; both for His interventions and for His delays: for He never brings out to me *His* resources till I am at the end of *my own*.

The Lord's question to Philip was not for information. "This He said to prove him, for He Himself knew what He would do." He always knows *how* every emergency of mine is to be met,

He knew, from the first, *what* He would do on that green hillside, and *how* He would do it. He knew the power that was in Himself; and so He went on calmly with His heavenly work till the right moment came for revealing that power. By His question He was not asking *food* from Philip; He was asking *faith*. The answer He *wanted* would have been, "Lord, all things are possible unto Thee; speak the word only, and this multitude shall be filled." But poor Philip could only begin to calculate and reckon up the cost in earthly coin! Very thoroughly did the question "prove" that disciple, and prove him to his shame. Does not my Lord often confront me with difficulties just to prove whether I have sufficient faith in Him or not? He has always a good reason for everything He does, or delays to do; and though the reason may be a merciful one, it is frequently a humbling one as well. For loss of health, for the miscarrying of my plans, for the emptying of my home, for the frustration of my hopes, for the baffling of my selfish schemes He has always a reason: and the reason may be this, to "prove" whether I know Him so well as to trust Him right through all. I will try, henceforth, to see written by His hand, over all the strange and inexplicable trials of my life, this great inscription, "this He did to prove him"; and then I will write with my own hand beneath it, "I will trust, and not be afraid." I will call even the barest

wilderness in my life by a new name, "Jehovah Jirah," for I am sure to see how wonderfully there "the Lord can provide." My own resources may be very small ; only a few loaves and fishes. But He can make them suffice, and more than suffice, for everything. The poorest Christian upon earth might lay his head down peacefully upon the pillow every night, with more than the comfortable feelings of a millionaire, if, after thinking of his little stock, and realising how poor it is, he would only add to it, "*and Christ, and Providence, and my Father in heaven, and the power that can supply all my need, and the Love that never fails.*"

So, too, in all my *work* for the Master, even the high spiritual work in which He may call me to be a sharer with Himself. He asks me, in that work, to reckon up my resources—not to make me feel how great, but how poor they are ; and so to throw myself, in utter helplessness, upon *His* great "power that worketh in me" ; a power great enough to bless my little store, till it feeds even thousands who are perishing for lack of the heavenly Bread. It is not my strength, but my weakness that the Master uses most. It is not my sufficiency, but my insufficiency ; not my fulness, but my emptiness that is the condition of all success. Sometimes I may feel surprised that my study and preparation, and all my mental furnishing produce so small an effect : and I may find the

reason to be this, that I was too strong and too full for God to use. I was like King Uzziah who "was marvellously helped, till he was strong, but when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he went into the temple to burn incense upon the altar, and the leprosy rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord." So long as he was weak, and knew his weakness, he was safe; but with the consciousness of strength came the presumption that led him to his fall. I may get too strong for God to dwell in me, too strong for God to use. "He giveth His power to *the faint*." It is to them that "have no might," and know that they have none, that He "increaseth strength." I can never have too little faith in my own resources: but I can never have too much faith in my Lord's. The hands I stretch out *for* Him, as well as the hands I stretch out *to* Him must be empty hands. Only by what *He* puts into them will a single soul be blessed.

XII

“WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?”

“Whom do *men* say that I the Son of man am?”—MATTHEW xvi. 13.

“But whom say *ye* that I am?”—MATTHEW xvi. 15.

THESE are still the most living questions of the age. “What think ye of Christ?” is a touchstone that tries everything else. What I am towards Christ, that is my real character before God. Character, condition, destiny, are all wrapped up in that.

As they came from my Master's lips these questions were profoundly pathetic ones. He had just been “alone, praying.” Burdened with the unbelief in His mission that met Him everywhere, He had been pouring out His heart in secret to the Father; and what the Father whispered to Him had been very sweet: and yet it would comfort Him a little to get from these disciples who knew Him best, some hearty Amen to the Father's voice; and so, leading up to the greater question

by a smaller one first, He asks, “Whom do *men* say that I am? and whom do *ye*?”

I notice, in their answer to the first question, an indication of how greatly the generality of the people *respected* the Master. They had only good to say of Him. The Pharisees could say nothing too bad about Him. *They* called Him a Samaritan, a blasphemer, a drunkard, a devil; but the general community had only good to say of the Wonder-worker and Wonder-speaker who moved amongst them so unostentatiously and so beneficently, day after day. Looking at the manysidedness of His character, the mingling in Him of a holy zeal for righteousness, and a gracious tenderness to the sinful and the sad, they had different names to give Him; but all of them great names, names of honour and respect. Yet that did not satisfy Him. It would have more than satisfied any of the disciples to be regarded so; but He claimed more than mere wonder, and liking, and respect. To be admired and followed as being even the wisest and best of men was not enough for Him; for He claimed to be Divine, and I find that it cheered the heart of my Lord to get from Peter’s heaven-taught reply a recognition of that truth; to get from him not *admiration* merely, but *adoration* too. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

All honest hearts, in so far as they know Christ at all, do still *respect* Him, at the least. “He

was a good man," say most. "He deceived the people," say only the few, and these few the men that know Him least. Rousseau pays Him compliments. Goethe thinks Him a gentleman of the first water. Renan extols His beautiful humanity. Thousands in our own day acknowledge Him to be an "ideal man." But none of these will admit Him to be anything higher than that. He is indeed a very serious difficulty to the race. In the first century He was a great perplexity; He has been a great perplexity ever since. Interest in this wonderful Christ cannot cease; but the leaders of the world's thought still find Him an insoluble problem. They cannot account for Him on any of the principles which alone they will admit. He is so evidently unique that they cannot classify Him. He is so many-sided that they do not know what shelf in their museum of heroes to put Him on.

For, to some He is only the *historical* Christ, a great and noble figure of the early time, a pattern man; and what they give Him is only the same hero-worship they give to many besides. To others He is not even so much as that. He is only a *poetic* Christ, a sublime beneficence with a halo round His head; too ethereal to have been ever actual; a beautiful dream or myth of ages long gone by. They treasure Him as the creation of devout fancy. Their imagination worships Him, but that is all. To some He is a *democratic*

Christ, a reformer, a revolutionist, a man whose teachings, if carried out, would upset all the ordinary evil conditions of society and bring in the golden age of brotherhood in all the earth. For that they enthrone Him and bow the knee, but for nothing else. There are some to whom He is only the *theological* Christ. He aids their speculations, He answers some of their doubts, He helps them to round off their theological beliefs; but it is merely intellectual supremacy they concede to Him. He moves their intellects, but never touches their hearts. There are others again to whom He is infinitely more, to whom He is, above all things else, the *atoning* Christ, the *sinner's* Christ, the uplifter of the fallen, the redeemer of the captive, the restorer of the strayed, the Saviour of the lost. These not only admire and reverence Him, they worship Him as well. They know and love Him, first as the sinner's Christ and then as the *disciples'* Christ. He is first the Christ of personal need, and then the Christ of personal experience; first a Christ whom faith receives, then a Christ whom love obeys. A Saviour first, and then a friend, and then a Master, and for evermore a Lord.

When I read the story of this Christ I see Him to be not merely the Highest and the Best in a long line of saintly souls, but standing out above all other men, in character absolutely unique.

I cannot but see that His absolute sinlessness is a glory that none else can share, and is sufficient of itself to place Him far outside the circle of mere humanity. I cannot but remember next that this pure, sinless one declared Himself to be the very Son of God. But such a claim, unless it were the simple truth, could not have been made by such a one as He; could only have been the raving of a fanatic, self-deluded and vain. I listen to Him saying, "No man cometh to the Father but by *Me*"; and I ask, Who then is this that claims a place in the universe such as that? No higher claim was ever made by human lip; and if the claim was not warranted by *truth*, then He who made it was only an impostor after all. I cannot forget, either, how He made Himself the court of last appeal, saying, "I am the Truth"; and how He died for this crime only, that He "*made Himself to be equal with God.*" As I think of all this there is but one conclusion possible. Either He was infinitely more than the "best of men," or He was greatly, disappointingly, less. Less He certainly was not. Therefore more He must have been. Unless I can *worship* this Jesus I cannot reverence Him as the best of men. Unless I can give Him my *adoration* I cannot give Him my respect. But, like Thomas, I fall at His feet and say, "My Lord and *my God.*"

Looking steadily, then, at my great Master to-day, I would ask myself what kind of Christ He

is to *me*. I would also ask what kind of witness I am to Him when He calls for my testimony to Him, and asks whether that testimony is borne by my lips alone, or by my life as well. “*What* dost thou say I am to thee? and *how* art thou saying it? Dost thou say it secretly, as if it were a thing of which thou art half ashamed? or dost thou say it openly, with the joyous tone of one who glories in confessing it? Does thy whole life say, and say unmistakably, ‘This Christ is my Redeemer and my King?’” Let me look honestly at all the outgoings of my daily life, and ask whether they are in any worthy degree a living testimony to Him. What am I the better for having Him as my acknowledged Lord? What is He the better for having me as His acknowledged disciple? Is He a real living Christ, *in* me who am a real living man? Is He a Christ whose image can be *seen* in me, and whom, through me, the world can better believe in, and better love?

My own personal experience of Christ is the only thing that will enable me to bear effective witness to Him. No man can have another man’s Christ; and no man can live upon another man’s experience of Christ. God’s Christ must be a Christ to *me* as though He had never been a Christ to any one else; and He must be a living, indwelling Christ, and not an historical Christ alone, if He is to be my reigning King. Let my testimony to Him not be a thing reserved

for high occasions, but a daily thing. Even Peter's noble confession of his Lord was too soon belied by cowardly denials. How *could* the man who cried out so enthusiastically, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," a few months afterwards say, "I know not the man"! Mine be a heart that will beat truer to my Lord than that. Mine therefore be the daily prayer, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

XIII

THE CIRCUMSPECTION OF THE FREE

“What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children or of strangers?”—MATTHEW xvii. 25.

No one can read the story in which this question lies without a feeling of profoundest reverence for the great Master's deep humility, and also for His tenderness to those that were blind to His glory. It is not merely His *humiliation* that is here; it is His *humility* when enduring the humiliation. “Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor,” so poor that He had not enough even to pay the small temple-tax; and *that* was wonderful. But He did not complain of His poverty, or feel it hard that He should have to suffer so; and that was more wonderful still. Then, too, when Peter, in his usual thoughtlessly impulsive way, had almost compromised his Master, his Master did not compromise *him* or show him

up. He did not so much as rebuke him for his hastiness, and tell him that he could not have pondered much his own recent confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," else he would have seen the inconsistency between such a confession, and the answer he had just been giving to the collector of the temple-tax. The meek and lowly Lord only asked him gently, when he came into the house, "Do kings levy taxes upon their own children, or upon strangers? Should not the children be free?"

I cannot but like Peter for being so jealous of his Master's honour. "Doth not your Teacher pay the temple-tax?" they said. It was not an ensnaring question, like many others. It was purely official, and even courteous in its tone, for they may have supposed this Teacher claimed to be exempt, as the Rabbis generally did; and Peter answered off-hand, "Of course He does, for He does everything that is right." But he had much to learn about his Master still. He needed to be taught the divine dignity of his Lord, as he had not apprehended it yet. So, very gently, Jesus asks him, "What thinkest thou, Simon? is it fitting that He who is the Lord of the temple, of whom the whole temple speaks, should be asked to pay dues for the service of the temple? and could He who came to be Himself the ransom for all other souls be asked to pay what meant a ransom for His own?" And yet He did it; and, in so

doing, placed Himself again, where, at His baptism by John, He had placed Himself already, in the position of a sinner, one of the sinful race He came to save ! It was profound humility this—taking upon Himself all the humiliations of the law, to “redeem them that were under the law”—willing to be reckoned among sinners if He could thereby take any stumbling-stone out of a sinner’s way, or get, by that means, a readier access to a sinner’s heart. “They do not understand,” He said, “that I am really Lord of all ; and if I were to claim exemption on that ground, they would only say I was giving a fanatical excuse, and was really irreligiously indifferent to the honour of God ; so, lest we should cause them to stumble and misconceive, go thou to the sea, and find there the tax-money for Me and thee.”

I must ponder this wonderful “lest we offend them.” It explains the whole life of my wonderful Master ; for that life was, from first to last, a giving up of His divine rights, a willing sacrifice of all that He might have claimed as His due, in order to become, through self-renunciation, a Saviour of the lost. So He is here, by His example, teaching me that, in my relations with other men, I am not to think simply of my own rights, but to consider how insistence on my rights may injure those who neither understand me, nor sympathise with me in my claims. I am to think, not only of the inherent lawfulness of many things I do, but also

of the possible harm they may do to less instructed or prejudiced men at my side. My liberty, as a child of God, whom "the Son hath made free," may give me, in a hundred things, the *right* to do what for the sake of others, I must *forbear* to do. It can never be the *only* question for me, "Is this lawful in itself?"; I am bound to add another question, "Will it injure, in any way, those who see me do it?" Some one has well said that "thousands do harm by the use of unlawful things; but tens of thousands by the unwise use of lawful things"; for nowhere does the devil build his little chapels more cunningly than close under the shadow of the great temple of Christian liberty. A thing in itself completely right and good, may be, in its effects on others, completely evil; and therefore, for me a Christian, completely wrong.

I am not to torment myself with unnecessary scruples and imaginary sins: but if I am ever in danger of "letting my good be evil spoken of"; if I care only for the abstract truth of things, and become so indifferent to an "appearance of evil" that my indifference leads others astray, I am bound to surrender my liberty. My right must not lead others wrong. No man "liveth to himself" alone; and no man is to "put a stumbling-stone in his brother's way," even though he himself is agile enough to over-leap it: for his weaker brother may attempt the leap and fall.

So, then, when the Master said, "If any man

will come after Me, let him deny himself," I think He meant not only "Let him deny his own *passions*," "Let him deny his own *ambitions*," "Let him deny his own *will*," "Let him deny his own *ease*," but also, "Let him deny his own *rights*, and so be My disciple." Surely it ought to be to me a far higher joy to walk in the footsteps of my self-sacrificing Master, than to gratify myself. If I can, and do, give thanks for my Christian liberty, I can give God even higher thanks for His grace that enables me to give up my liberty, whenever I can thereby remove a single stone of prejudice, or misconception, or temptation, from a brother's way. I will not surrender my *conscience* for any man, but I will gladly surrender my *rights*, if, by doing so, I can better serve my self-forgetting and self-sacrificing Lord. For, what is the good of a religion that lets me look down upon men who are in darkness, and only congratulate myself that I am in the light? I must have a religion of practical sympathy with the blindness of men, of tender care for their prejudices, of love strong enough to help them to the uttermost against their temptations and against their sins.

And yet how slow I am to feel as my Master felt! How indignant I sometimes feel if my rights are not given me, if I am not recognised and appreciated as I think I ought to be! How easily I stand upon my dignity, if I am not treated with due deference! How hard it is for me to be always

clothed with humility, as my great Master was! How little inclined I often am to give up what ministers to my own comfort, or ease, for the sake of being helpful to the weaknesses of others; or, to “seek not mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved”!

Perhaps it would help me to settle many doubtful questions regarding matters affecting my practical life were I to bring them to such a test as Christ’s example here; and to ask, not simply, “Can I do this without any harm to myself?” but, “Can I do it without harm to others?” What would my own honest verdict on my daily life be, if I were to lay it alongside of the example and precepts of my Master, and by that high standard judge what its character and complexion really are? Let me learn to weigh everything in His perfect balance—my business and my recreation; my getting and my spending; my reading and my conversation; my food and my drink; my entertainments and my dress; my public life, my social life, my domestic life, my private life; my friendships and my correspondence; my speaking and my listening; the glances of my eye, the tones of my voice; my words *to* others, my words *about* others; my silence as well as my speech. Let me faithfully test all this, asking whether it is, all of it, “to the glory of God,” as was everything, however small, that my Master did. “*All to the glory of God!*”—What a grand idea! What a

magnificent thought, that I can add to the glory of God by my obedience and my self-sacrifice, even in trivial things ! But, "*all to the glory of God !*"—What a thunderbolt that is, to be sent crashing through my self-pleasings, overturning everything that stands in its way !

"How shall I follow Him I serve ?
 How shall I follow Him I love ?
 Nor from those blessed footsteps swerve,
 Which lead me to His seat above ?
 To faint, to grieve, to die for me
 Thou camest—not Thyself to please—
 And, dear as earthly comforts be,
 Shall I not love Thee more than these ? "

XIV

DIVINE SHEPHERDHOOD

“How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?”—MATTHEW xviii. 12.

SOME of the Master's most beautiful and most touching words sprang out of what was causing Him the deepest pain. The bruising of His spirit only made it exhale its sweetest perfume on all around. The pain that produced this exquisite parable of Divine Love was occasioned by that unsubdued pride in His disciples which made them eager for pre-eminence in place and power; wanting to know which of them would be highest in the kingdom He had been telling them of. Jesus, casting His eye over the ceaseless, foolish strifes of men, and this new illustration of them, seemed to be saying to Himself, “What a world it is! What a selfish world! What a proud world, too; every one trampling others down, to get a little higher up! Even

My own disciples no better than the rest!" It went to His heart to see it. So, to shame them out of it, He began by setting a little child in their midst, and saying, "You want to be high? Well, then, be as low as this little child"; and then, to bring them down from their pride still more, He lifted for a moment the veil that hung between them and the invisible world, and showed them the highest and holiest of created beings, serving joyfully and humbly the very weakest of the world below them; and He finished by telling them again how He, the Lord of angels, had come to men just to do the same—to humble Himself for the seeking and saving of the lost. "You are seeking to be great," He says, "remember that the greatest is the lowliest and most self-effacing of all."

My Lord is leading me here into a "great deep," His own heart of grace. He is bidding me think of two marvels of that grace, the wonder of which only grows the longer I meditate upon them, His utter lowliness, and His infinite love. If there be any truth in the idea that this poor earth of ours is the only one of all the million orbs of the sky that sin has wrecked, I can see one reason, at least, why "He took not on Him the nature of angels," but "was found in fashion as a man." He was leaving the ninety and nine worlds that were sinless and sheltered and safe, to go after the one wanderer, the one that needed Him most. He "came, not to be ministered unto, but to

minister"; and therefore He came not to any world that was sinless, but to the world that was "lost"—not to the largest world, but to the world which had the largest need: and He thought nothing too hard, and nothing too humiliating to do for the saving of it. This was His own all-sufficient reason for the Incarnation, and all that followed it. He was "humbling Himself, even to death," for the saving of the lost. Divine love is humble love. It is the humblest of all love; humbler, even, than a mother's love. It is a love that can die gladly for the most unworthy child; a love that can take the poor, degraded, ruined one to its breast, even when, with all the energy of a rebellious nature, that lost one is spurning the love away, and saying to the tenderest Heart in all the universe, "Get thee hence." The only *adequate* measure of love is the sacrifice the love will make. The highest form of love is love unto death; and the grandest illustration of love, in its intensity of self-sacrifice, was that given all along by Jesus of Nazareth; so that the beautiful idea of an old German mystic is strictly true, "I seem to see a rich vessel, laden with the love of God, sailing for thousands of years across the world's sea, till at last it anchors in the harbour of Bethlehem, and discharges all its treasures on the hill of Calvary."

The wonderful thing about this Shepherd's love for the wandered sheep was that He was seeking *them* while they were not seeking *Him*—when

there was not even a feeble cry for help, for they did not know that they were lost. He sought them, not when they were repenting, ashamed, afraid, but when they were still wandering farther and farther astray. He went out seeking them in all sorts of places, by all sorts of means ; and He sought them one by one. It mattered nothing to Him what kind of sheep they were. I do not hear Him say, " What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose *the best of them*, doth not go after it?" He went, with equal eagerness, after the very worst. He did not say, " It is only one, and will never be missed." Any *one* was as dear to Him as the other ninety-nine. And it was not the loss as felt by the sheep, but *His own loss* that moved Him to the search. The wandering of even one brought a pang to His own heart, which seemed to have its origin in a keen sense of missing what had been precious to Him. It is really in this feeling of loss on the part of God that I find the explanation of the great sacrifice He made, in the gift of His Son, to have that loss repaired. When man fell away from Him, He missed what had been His joy—the praise and honour of human lives, the affection of human hearts ; and the whole mission of His dear Son was just one long echo of the words, " How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? My heart is turned within Me ; My repentings are kindled together." Does not the sense of loss at the beginning of the search corre-

spond emphatically to the joy at its successful close? "Verily I say unto you He rejoiceth more over that one sheep than over the ninety and nine that never strayed." He loves it now all the more for the pain He had to find it. How deep my Master here lets me look into His very heart! He seems to say that infinite love will go to any distance, and endure any toil, for the saving of *one sheep*—that Almighty Power will think its utmost expenditure of power both recompensed and glorified by the saving of *one sheep*.

Then, too, when He finds the poor lost one half dead, He does not beat it for having strayed; He does not simply lift it to its feet and leave it to find its own way back; He knows that *no sheep ever finds its own way back*. It can wander, but it cannot return. Still less, does He angrily *drive* it home. He lays it upon His shoulder and carries it the whole way home. Weary Himself, He lifts it, and returns triumphantly with the lost one in His arms.

It may well thrill my heart to remember how *I* was once a lost sheep—foolishly, yet utterly, lost—and how the Lord of love came seeking *me*, and found me, and lifted me with His strong hand so that I am now at home again, and safe. Let me praise my Shepherd for all that He has done, and praise Him, also, for all that He is going to do to keep His recovered one, and feed it till it gains new strength to follow Him without wandering any more.

But let me think, also, of my great Shepherd-Master as an example to myself: for the work He gives me to do is just His own work—to seek and save the lost sheep round me, *one by one*. He never spoke of “lapsed masses.” He spoke of “lost souls.” His love was an individualising love, and His methods were individualising too. I do not read of many conversions through His discourses to the multitudes (though there must have been such), but I read of conversions when He spoke to *one Nathanael* near his fig-tree; to *one Nicodemus* in the garden privacy; to *one Levi* at the seat of custom; to *one Samaritan woman* at Jacob’s well; to *one Zaccheus* at Jericho. Perhaps I can imitate Him best by taking a way like this; having first of all, an intenser pity for the lost, and next, a hopeful earnestness in seeking them, “despairing of none.”

There may be some lost ones in my own family, or among my dear and intimate friends, loving and kind, but, for all that, strangers to the renewing grace of God, and therefore “lost.” There may be others living in close neighbourhood to me, meeting me every day, talking with me, united to me by a thousand different interests, yet plainly living “without Christ,” and therefore “lost.” Do I seek to save any of these lost ones whom I know so well? Do I ever let them see that I am concerned about their souls? or do I maintain, on the highest of all matters, a silence deep as death?

Am I *afraid* to speak? Am I *ashamed* to speak? Am I *delaying* to speak till some better moment comes? What, then, if a pang of unavailing remorse should seize me at the last, when they have gone for ever from my side, and I can only reproach myself for having been so unlike my Master in seeking to save? "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God!"

XV

SMALL BEGINNINGS AND GREAT ENDINGS

“ Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these.”—JOHN i. 50.

RIGHTLY to understand the meaning of this question to Nathanael, I must look at what can be gleaned of the spiritual history of the man to whom it was addressed. It is clear that a long secret preparation for welcoming the Christ had been going on in Nathanael's heart. He had long been a devout student of the Scriptures ; a man, too, of much prayer ; a man accustomed to deep heart searchings, that he might be absolutely sincere in his personal walk with God ; a man, therefore, completely open to the truth, and waiting for it. But, in addition to that, he had very recently been passing through an experience more than ordinarily deep ; laying bare to God, with more than usual fervency the innermost secrets of his soul : and

this had been so entirely a secret between himself and God, that, when Jesus said, "When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee," there instantly flashed upon him the conviction that the Reader of the *heart* was there. These words of Jesus were like a telegraphic cypher, unintelligible to all else, but full of deep meaning for him.

The key to that secret experience of his is given in the words "Behold! an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Under the fig-tree's friendly shade, secure from observation, he had evidently been laying bare his whole heart to God, and asking from Him some token of peace. Perhaps, devout reader of the Scriptures as he was, he may have been meditating on the thirty-second Psalm, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, to whom the Lord imputeth not transgression, *and in whose spirit there is no guile*"; and saying to himself "Oh, that this blessedness were mine!" If, then, I may suppose that just when he had been saying so to himself, he was suddenly interrupted by Philip coming to him, and calling him to see the very Christ they had both been long looking for, how amazed he must have been that the first greeting of Jesus took up the broken thread of his unspoken thoughts, and told him that what he so longed for was already his! "How knowest thou me to be an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile?" "I saw thee under the fig-tree." That was enough.

The whole truth flashed upon him in a moment then—"this Reader of my most secret thoughts must verily be the Christ."

Fittest type, surely, this man, of the kind of disciples the Master not only receives, but rejoices over, when they come and follow Him. The precipitancy of his hasty word to Philip, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was redeemed from its error by its very sincerity. It was due to Philip's own mistake; and if it was an error of education and prejudice more than anything else, it did not deepen into the sin of offence and rejection, as it did in so many other men; for he was sincere to the very core, a genuine truth-lover, who, welcoming first the truth about *himself*, was soon rewarded by learning the truth about his Saviour too.

Nathanael's open confession of the Lord followed close upon the Lord's open confession of him. Christ made no secret of His opinion of this disciple; and the disciple made no secret of his opinion of Christ. I think there was something beautifully significant, too, in the fact that Jesus did not go to seek Nathanael under the dark shadow of his fig-tree, but waited till they both stood in the sunshine, that there He might reveal Himself as the Light of Life. Whosoever *seeks* Christ in the darkness, will *find* Him in the light. Whosoever prays *in secret* to Him who seeth in secret, will find the Father reward him *openly*.

And how does Christ reward this "*believest thou?*" He says "Thou shalt *see*," and "see greater things than these." *This was the first promise Jesus ever gave to any man*, and it really embraces all He can teach any man still; but it was given, not to the most talented, or intellectual, or profound of His disciples, but to the most simple-hearted of them all. Is not that always the Master's way? He manifests Himself most fully to those that manifest themselves most fully to Him. He lays open *His* secrets to those that most perfectly lay open *theirs*. Those who have an opened *heart* will soon have also the opened *eye*.

The Lord seems here to be promising to all such simple and guileless hearts a larger discovery of the wonders of His grace in the new region they have only begun to explore. "Believest thou that I am the Omniscient One, able to read the secrets that lie within? Thou shalt see Me to be also the Omnipotent One, able to unfold the secrets that lie without. Thou hast been showing Me thy opened heart; I will show thee My opened heaven. Thou hast been confessing evil things in thyself; thou shalt see gracious things in Me. Thou hast been discovering worse and worse things in thyself; thou shalt see better and better things in Me: thou shalt see that, in Me, earth and heaven are no longer two, but one; where I am, there is 'the house of God, and the gate of heaven'; by Me the angels of prayer and praise are ever going up;

by Me, the angels of grace and blessing are ever coming down." The Lord, therefore, is here teaching me that though faith must always go before sight, it is sure to be rewarded by sight ere long; that, if I begin with the "believing," the "seeing" will come. I will be able to speak from experience soon of the things I begin by taking upon trust. Believing on the testimony of One who does see, I shall see for myself.

It was the power of Jesus to read the heart that led Nathanael to the conviction that He was the *Son of God*. It is the power of the Scriptures to search my heart that convinces me that they are the *Divine Word of God*. No other argument is so sufficient as that. This is a book that, like no other, searches me through and through, probes me to the bottom, lays me bare. It seems to know all about me, for it writes down all my experiences; it utters all my feelings; it shows me what I am. I need nothing more to convince me that it is God Himself who speaks *of* me, and speaks *to* me here. I read it with amazement first, but soon I read it with more than amazement; with thankfulness and joy. For, if it begins with showing me my sins, it soon shows me "greater things than these." I am taught by this heart-searching Word what it is that I, a sinner, need—what it is I am half unconsciously seeking for; and soon I discover that what I need is a Saviour, and that in the saving Christ of whom it tells, all I need, and all I am

longing for is found. It speaks to me of pardon ; it brings to me the message of peace ; it opens heaven itself to my wondering eyes ; and the farther on I go, I am always finding in it "greater things" than at the first I could have believed it possible for me to know. Once I could not see how any real intercourse between me and God could come. To *reach* God seemed impossible. Strive as I might, I could only struggle upwards to Him a little way, for my ladder of endeavour had so many broken steps that my further progress was barred. It was equally a mystery to me how God the Holy One could have any intercourse with me. But I see it now, for this book tells me of the "Son of Man," who is Himself the perfect ladder joining earth to heaven. *He* is the one medium of communication between the two — between earthly need and heavenly aid. By Him I ascend to God. By Him God descends to me. By Him my prayers, like angel messengers, go up. By Him the angels of grace, and power, and peace, come down.

All this I had to take as a matter of faith at first, but soon it became a matter of experience also ; and still, the more I look, the more I am able to see. Like the practised astronomer, whose disciplined eye can see a small star in the sky, where, to others, there is only a space of dark ; like the worker in mosaics, who can detect shades of colour unappreciable by the unskilled ; like the

Laplander, who can easily distinguish a white fox upon the snow ; or like the sailor, who can recognise a distant ship where the landsman sees not even a spot on the horizon's edge, I get something like a new power of sight from the practice of the feeble seeing with which I begin. What once was invisible becomes wonderfully clear. I walk by faith, but faith issues in a larger sight. This is the Master's way of educating me for the beatific vision at the end—"Believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these."

I must plant a Nathanael fig-tree beside my house, wherever that house may be, and under the shade of it have more of Nathanael's self-scrutiny, and Nathanael's prayerfulness. Let this disciple assure me, from his own experience, that whoever so humbleth himself shall be exalted ; and that the Lord is more gracious to the broken heart, than it can itself believe.

XVI

HARVEST HOPE

“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”—JOHN iv. 35.

THIS was one of the Lord's moments of joyous expectancy. Early in His great work the Father gave Him a poor Samaritan sinner's soul, as an earnest of thousands yet to come. His heart was leaping with the gladness of hope, as He saw the men of Sychar flocking out to Jacob's well; and He felt sure that the Father who had sent Him to “sow in tears” was going to give Him soon the “joy of harvest” too. It was the month of January. The recently-sown corn in the valley of Shechem was already bursting the earth in a wealth of green. The disciples, as they came along from buying bread, had noted it, and had been saying, one to another, “Four months hence there will be a rich harvest here”; and Jesus, knowing this talk of theirs, said, “Yes, but I can

tell you of another kind of seed that ripens even faster than that. I know of seed that was sown only to-day, and yet, see! there is the harvest-field already white: the crowds are coming out of Sychar even now."

This saying of the Master's reminds me how constantly He lived on a far higher plane than the best of His disciples could reach. He was always moving, in thought, among the great spiritual realities, of which things below were only the shadows and the types. When they were thinking of meat for the body, He was thinking of, and feasting on, a "meat" more blessed and more sustaining far; while they were talking about a harvest of grain, He was thinking of a harvest of souls. *They* were like men far down in a valley whose outlook is limited and poor; *He* was like one living on a mountain-top, where the horizon is heaven. Perhaps one reason why I, so often, do not *understand* my Master when He speaks, is this, that He is using His own heavenly language, the grammar and even the alphabet of which are still half strange to me; and perhaps one reason why I so poorly *imitate* my Master is that I am not accustoming myself to climb to that heavenly height where He habitually lived. Why do I not see what my Master saw? Is it not because I do not rise high enough to my Master's side? Would I be so earthly-minded if I did? Would I be so self-pleasing if I did? Would I be so disheartened

if I did? If I could always sow, as He did, with faith and love and hope like His, might not I, too, see my harvest the very day the sowing was begun? I will let Him take me up to His own mountain of vision to-day to show me what He sees, for He is speaking for my encouragement, and very specially for my encouragement when I am seeking to be a "fellow-labourer with Him unto the kingdom of God."

He tells me here that no faithful sowing of the seed of the kingdom can ever be in vain. "God's seed is sure to come to God's harvest," even though only "after many days." I cast it into the ground, and go my way. It is lost to my view. For all I can tell, it may have perished. But God's care of it begins just where my care of it ends, and *He* will see to its reappearing in due time. I have often no means of discovering the fruit of my most faithful efforts and most persevering prayers for other souls; and when the soil is poor, and the season is bad, I get sometimes into a mood of depression that verges on despair. But my Master would have me consider that though no fruit *has* followed yet, and even though none *will* follow it so long as I am on earth to witness it, yet when I do see it, either *in* the world beyond or looking *from* the world beyond, I may find a harvest whose exceeding richness will be a glad surprise. It is with present duty, and not with future results, that I have alone to do. This wise Master may be only

training me to larger faith and longer perseverance by denying me a sight of the harvest I am longing for. He Himself has told me "to pray and not to faint," to work, "despairing of none"; for in the sowing of heavenly, just as in the sowing of earthly, seed, "the husbandman must have long patience, till it receive *both the early and the latter rain.*" The full harvest will not come without them both; and sometimes the "latter rain" does what the "early rain" could not. The early rain of family instruction, in loving words and quiet influence, may need to be supplemented by a latter rain of drenching afflictions before any real growth of the buried seed appears. Long lying dormant through the hot season of unclouded prosperity, it gets its baptism of life when the clouds of trouble break over it in heavy floods. The appeals that were unheeded so long as all was bright are listened to and yielded to when the dark hour of sorrow comes. It is wonderful how often God's seed is quickened by falling tears. But, soon or late, the harvest of the faithful sower is sure.

But my Lord encourages me by telling me more than that. He tells me that I may reap not only what I myself have sown, but what others have sown long before me; that others may reap what I am sowing to-day; and that though the sower and the reaper may never meet on this side heaven, they shall, in the great harvest day, "rejoice together" over the harvest, in the producing of which they both

had had a share. And He tells me yet again that I may get a harvest from my own sowing sooner than I think. At the very moment when I am saying dolefully, "Months yet must pass before the harvest can be mine," He may be saying, "Look! the field is already white." Let me take home this loving encouragement from His lips. *He* may be seeing with joy the workings of His grace in souls that *I* think completely dead. Where the very utmost I can hope for is that the seed is *beginning* to take root, He may see that the beginning was past long ago, that the preparatory processes are already finished, and that I will reap almost at once.

Perhaps in my work for God I may be wronging Him, as well as discouraging myself, by looking only far ahead for fruit. The faith that can calmly wait is good, but the faith that can expect a rapid ripening may be better still. God is honoured when I expect not only *great* answers, but *speedy* answers to my efforts and my prayers. Moody used to say that God never does any great thing by a despondent man. The very largest hopefulness is one condition of success for all labourers in God's field. Without this, their work will be only a grievous burden, instead of being what He means it to be, a glory and a joy. One of these desponding sowers complained to Spurgeon that he saw almost no conversions through his ministry. "Do you *expect* conversions from every sermon you

preach?" was the reply. "Oh no," said the poor worker; "I could not venture to look for anything like *that*." "Well, well," said the great preacher, "according to your faith, be it unto you." "Attempt great things *for* God, and expect great things *from* God," was the watchword that started missions to India. But He is honoured by a faith that, when He calls for service, goes immediately to work, and looks for *immediate* as well as *great* success. If I am looking to the future at all for my harvest, it is rather a *near* future than a distant one of which I ought to think. Perhaps the law may hold in my labour for God, as in my personal life before Him, that I get just what I am working for. If I am working for a late harvest, I will get it; but *if I am working for an early harvest, I may get that too*.

When I am looking doubtfully and despondingly at my prospects of success, the whisper of my Master comes to me that many a soul about which I am concerned may be far more ready to respond to my appeals than I suppose; and when I look farther afield, over the great unsaved world, the vast world of heathenism and superstition and ignorance and cruelty and sin, and its millions seem to me so hardened in their indifference to God that long years of ploughing will be needed to make so much as a beginning for the sowing of His seed, He whispers to me again to be of good courage and good cheer, for even now there are

thousands of weary and heavy-laden hearts there longing for His rest, stretching out their hands in their darkness, feeling after Him, if haply they may find Him, and far more ready to welcome His messages of love than my faint-heartedness and fears believe. I thank Thee, oh my Master, for these great words of Thine, "The fields are white unto the harvest even now."

XVII

WISE STEWARDSHIP

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?”
—MATTHEW xxiv. 45.

“If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? and if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?”—LUKE xvi. 11, 12.

THESE questions are all about my stewardship; and though I have been for long years under the teaching of my Lord, His lesson for me to-day is as much needed as ever—that I am not my own, but His; not my own master, but His servant only; not a possessor, but only a steward; and that for even the smallest thing entrusted to me He will reckon with me soon. I often, like Peter, to whom first my Master spoke these words, take gladly enough His promises of honour in His kingdom; but all the time give little heed to the warning that accompanies them, that unfaithfulness to my stewardship will cost the losing of

the reward. Not one of the disciples *needed* that warning more than Peter did ; yet he was the one who *heeded* it the least. I am too like Peter every day. The work of a steward is *responsible* work. Life should be more to me than a scene of easy-going self-indulgence. The work of a steward is *difficult* work. I need to be wise as well as faithful in it. But it is also *blessed* work ; for it will bring me now the sweetest of all satisfactions, and hereafter the greatest of all rewards. Let me, therefore, think seriously of the trust which this Master has put into my hands.

My own soul is a sacred trust. All that I am, as well as all that I have, is to be used for Him. I am bound to cultivate my soul, that it may not lie a waste. I am bound to discipline it, that it may not be full of briars and thorns. I must carefully guard it from the spoiler's foot. It ought to be a garden where my Lord can walk. I am bound to consecrate all its emotions, all its affections, all its ambitions, all its endowments, to glorify and gladden Him. When I go up to render my account He will ask me what I have done with the things He put into my hands ; but He will also ask me what I have done *with myself*. Could I say, " Lord, thou didst send me forth with a handful of seeds ; here is my garden full of flowers for Thee " ?

My soul's tenement, the body, is also a sacred trust. I am to keep it pure too : not yielding any

one of my members, eye or ear or mouth or hand or foot, a servant to iniquity, but to holiness. And I am to keep it strong as well as pure. The laws of health are the laws of God; and to disregard them, even in the pursuit of what is right and good, is sin. Suicide does not become guiltless because the process may be slow. I am to "present my *body* a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto Him."

My *earthly avocation* is also a sacred trust; and I am to engage in it as responsible to Him. If I cannot use it for His glory, it is not lawful for myself; and if lawful, I am still to feel that I can lawfully carry it on only as a steward for a Master in heaven. He speaks to me not only of a kingdom of heaven into which I may go, but of a kingdom of heaven that must come into me, and rule me, and sanctify me every moment of my life; and I could make my little world almost heaven-like if the gracious sovereignty of my Master swayed me every hour. I am not asked to do heavenly work; but to do my earthly work in a heavenly way; and the commonest work, if done under my Master's eye, will be blessed work, be it what it may. I am to *sanctify* my ordinary pursuits; not to run away from them. The truest piety does not consist in being absorbed in the invisible, but in being godly in the visible. From monks and hermits God never got much honour, nor the world much good. It is devoutly to be

hoped that many of those water-logged "saints" that lived their useless lives, slowly rotting in damp stone cells and caves, were taken to heaven when they died; but surely they were amongst the poorest of all human commodities ever taken in. I am to be *in* the world, though not *of* it; and only by serving my brethren can I serve my Lord.

My position in life, too, is another trust given me to use for Him. If I ever weakly say to myself that I would do much more good were I only in a better position for doing it, I must remember that the only possible way of proving that to be true is my doing all the good I possibly can in the position I occupy now. But, if a servant of God at all, I can be His servant anywhere, whether, like Abel, I am a keeper of sheep; or, like Obadiah, a courtier; or, like Daniel, a statesman; or, like Luke, a physician; or, like Zenas, a lawyer; or, like Cornelius, a soldier; or, like Erastus, a city-chamberlain; or, like David, a king. I can sanctify my own small home, if I cannot correct all the evils of the State. I can weep with some lonely mourner, if I cannot dry all the world's tears. I can talk to a few, if I have no vocation to preach to the many. I can give Christ some of my time, if I cannot give Him my gold. I can be, at least, a lamp in my own dark street, if I cannot be a star in the sky. I have just to do the good that lies nearest to my hand—"whatsoever

my hand *findeth* (not *seeketh*) to do''; and to do it just because it is given me to do. My Master's will, my Master's approval, my Master's love, should be enough.

My time, too, is a sacred trust. Every day of my life, as well as every faculty of my soul, belongs to Him. To trifle with a master's time is the besetting sin of workmen everywhere; and it seems not to be regarded as in the least a wrong. But to trifle with God's time is to waste what does not belong to me; and that must be quite as sinful as to seize, for my own purposes, His goods. For, *opportunities of usefulness* are a sacred trust. How sinfully I often let these slip! How shamefully I let cowardice, procrastination, fear of men, love of ease, shrinking from the cross, and other things of a like kind, prevent my seizing the chances that come to me of speaking a word in season, either of gentle expostulation or of sympathetic love!

Then, too, *the trials and sorrows of life* through which I am sometimes led must be looked upon as among the most sacred of the trusts committed to my hands. Very seldom do I regard them so. They are thought of as hindrances, not as helps. But if the great Master gives to one servant abundant wealth, to another high position, to another rich endowments of brain, He sometimes gives to one whom He greatly loves a sore and lengthened trial, that out of it He may get something for

His praise. He sometimes seems to say, "I will give you a painful sickness or infirmity to bear for weary years; or bereavements in quick succession, emptying both heart and home; or losses and privations which will make your life what men would call only a dreary struggle with misfortune—but I will do all this just that you may show how My sustaining grace can keep you calm, how My love within you can make the wilderness to blossom as the rose; how when Hagar's bottle is spent God's fountain comes into view; how out of the eater there can come forth such meat as it is worth any pain to be able to taste; and you will be a witness to Me even in your suffering, a better servant in your utter weakness, than hundreds who are strong and glad." The effect of all kinds of affliction is twofold—differing according to the character of those who suffer it. It is like the twofold effect of fire. Some men come out of it as bricks do, only the harder for the burning. God's chosen ones, His trustful ones, come out of it as gold does, the purer for the heat—and not only the purer in themselves, but the better fitted for being fashioned into vessels of honour for the Master's use.

To realise this stewardship of mine, in all its length and breadth must make life to me a solemn thing, for I know not how soon my Lord will call for an account of my stewardship, and show whether I have been faithful or unfaithful

in it. But how it *simplifies* life, to regard all of it as stewardship to Christ! If I make this my aim, if this is the "one thing that I do," I will find that glorifying my Master takes up all my hours; and then His omnipresence will be a precious reality to me. I will live hourly as under His eye, and the thought of it will overshadow me like the wings of the cherubim. My heart finding God, where my creed declares Him to be—that is, everywhere—I will live so near to Him that I shall never be "out of touch" with my Father in heaven. Glances of love will be always going up from me to Him, and glances of love will always be coming down from Him to me. I would seek, therefore, to live every day as I would have my Master find me when He comes—with all my accounts in perfect readiness for His inspecting eye; and if He will only say to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant," I shall be satisfied for ever.

XVIII

UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS

“Which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say to him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? and will not rather say to him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself and serve me till I have eaten and drunken and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”—LUKE xvii. 7-10.

My first thought, on hearing this question of my Master's, might naturally be, “This is a hard saying.” It seems to represent Him as an inconsiderate taskmaster, mercilessly exacting, concerned only about His own ease, utterly unconcerned about mine, and grudging me even the smallest recognition of my service, serve Him as unweariedly as I may. This seems to me the more strange because Luke alone records it, that disciple who had so keen an eye and ear for all that was most *loving* in His Master's acts and words, and

always brought His exceeding *graciousness* fully into view.

And yet, on farther thought, I see that the Master's design in the parable is not to show what He is, but what I am, and ought to feel myself to be. It is not to teach me the verdict I should pass upon *Him*, but the verdict I should pass upon *myself*. His relation to me is not one of *contract*, but of *ownership*. I am what Paul so gladly called himself, the "bondslave of Jesus Christ." I am not hired to do just so much, and no more. I belong to this Master absolutely. He has "bought me with a price," and has a right to all my time, and all my exertions too. I have no claim on Him. I have no right to be rewarded for my service; and I must have no self-complacency, as if I had done something very extraordinary, when I have done "all that it was my duty to do."

A slave could never say or feel that his work was done. He had to keep himself at his master's call, by night as well as by day; and *I* am to be always at my Master's call. Though the call may come at the most inconvenient time, I am to rise and obey. He makes no contract to pay me "for over-time"; for my whole time is to be His. I am to be always working, always waiting, always watching; and I am not to complain of this, as if it were a species of martyrdom. I am never to feel as the bargaining disciples felt, when they said, "Lo, we have left all and followed Thee: what shall

we have therefore?" I am to remember that I am wholly His, to do with me what He will; and so I am neither to pity myself for anything I bear, nor plume myself on anything I do. Even when I have done my very best I am to feel that I might have done far more. I am to lament that I have served Him so poorly, at the very time that I gratefully acknowledge His own sustaining grace, without which I could not have done even that. The safeguard against all self-complacency is to be the deep conviction that, at my longest and my best, I have done *no more* than it was "my duty to do."

There is this to be remembered, too—that, apart from any question of reward, the very surest way to spoil my work is to grow proudly self-complacent over it. Indeed, my work will begin to deteriorate the moment I am satisfied with it. A great painter said sadly once, "My powers are failing; and what convinces me that they are is this, that I am now satisfied with my productions, as I never was before." Let me listen to my Master's warning against the subtle foe to all sincerity, and to all progress as well. "After ye have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants, having done only that which it was our duty to do."

Is it very hard for me to feel like that? Have I sometimes hard thoughts of my Master for demanding from me so much as that? Then let

me remember that the whole complexion of my service is completely changed the moment I realise that I am not to work for wages, but out of love, and that the rest and release I often crave (not from unwillingness to go on, but from my natural weariness when I have to meet incessant calls), if not given me here, is to be given indeed in the new world where "His servants rest from their labours," and yet—strange paradox—"serve Him day and night in His temple," their work being only joy, and their weariness for ever past.

I am a servant, and yet I am a son. I am a son, and yet I cannot cease to be a servant also. The better son I am, I will be the better servant; and if it is my love that constrains me to serve, I will not ask impatiently how long the service is to go on. Instead of complaining that my work is never done, I will rather rejoice that I can never be out of His employment; that, as soon as I have finished one work given me to do, He has some new work ready for me to undertake. Perhaps I too often lose the bright glow that ought to shine as a halo round simple duty. Someone has said that the noblest word in the English language is "Duty"; and certainly "duty" should appeal to me more powerfully than it often does. *Duty* should be as dear to me as *Love*. It was so with my Master. He gloried in being just the unresting servant of the Father. To do the Father's will down to the smallest detail, as much as to finish the Father's

work in the great sweep of its grandest issues, was His only aim ; and because He served from love, the hardest service was to Him a joy. Should not the "same mind be in me that was in Christ Jesus" ; and would not "His joy thus be fulfilled" in me?

This is really the only cure for that feeling of worried depression and disappointment that comes now and then on even an earnest worker for God ; comes oftenest, perhaps, to those who are most earnest. Really it is caused by nothing else than seeking my own will instead of His. If there *is* toil in my work, has not His will appointed the toil? If there are disappointments in my work, does He not include the disappointments in His plan for me? What Mary, the mother of the Lord, once whispered to the servants in the house at Cana, is the best of rules for me, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." If He bids me labour on through all the heat, and only begin fresh labour when the cool of the day has come, let me say at once, "the will of my Lord be done." If He bids me, like another Paul, "depart far hence to the Gentiles," and serve Him among the heathen, let me go at once, however strongly I would prefer to stay and serve at home. If, when I am burning with a desire to follow Him in greater things, He only says to me, "Return to thine house, and tell them what great things I have done for thee," let me do it, without grudging myself the loss of the

honour of being with Him in His larger works. If, in the midst of fruitful work in some Samaria, He says to me, "Arise, and go down by the way of the south which is desert," let me go willingly even though the "desert" should mean to me, not different activity as it did to Philip, but a sick-bed with long years of pain; let me make no complaint, whatever my Master may call me to do or to bear; sure that wherever I follow out my Lord's commands, I am following my Lord Himself, and He will be with me still. That will be an end of every worry and of every fear.

And yet, for my comfort, let me think that there is another side of the picture than that which alone is presented here. The Master, *here*, is speaking only of what the feelings of the servant should be; but He spoke at another time of what His own feelings about His servants' work will be shown at last to be. "Blessed are those servants whom their lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily, I say unto you, that he shall *gird himself*, and make *them* to sit down to meat, and will come forth *and serve them*." If He did not "thank the servant" once, and the servant therefore thought Him cold and hard, he will reverse that judgment of his Master afterwards. Though *I* call myself an unprofitable servant, it does not follow that *He* will call me so. Though I serve Him simply out of love, *looking* for no reward, it does not follow that there *shall* be no reward. I did not want to be

“thanked” for my service. My only aim was just to be “approved,” to be “accepted of Him”; but He will not let me always want an outspoken commendation: He will give me even more than that. “He will make *me* sit down to meat, and serve *me*.” Is it so, that whatever I do for Him He will do for me? that if I love my Master He will love me? that if I honour my Master He will honour me? that if I serve my Master He will serve me? Then I understand how, when He says at last, “I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat, thirsty and ye gave Me drink,” and the humbled servants, more humbled by His praise than even by their own defects, say, “Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered and fed Thee, or thirsty and gave Thee drink?” He should not only say, “Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me,” but should entrance them with the exceeding magnificence of the reward reserved for them, “Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.”

XIX

HEROIC CHRISTIANITY

“What do ye more than others?”—MATTHEW v. 47.

“If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.”—LUKE vi. 32-34.

Most searching questions these for my quiet hour to-day! They are both very broad and very deep. They cover the whole expanse of my daily life, and yet they lead me up to such heights of Christian feeling as I almost despair of being able to reach. The Master expects His disciples to be not only good, but supremely good; not merely as good as others, but better than the best of others. He expects to see in me higher aspirations, tenderer feelings, kindlier affections, purer love, more generous hands, than He finds in other men. I am not to take on any *airs* of superiority; and yet I am to be superior to the general morality of the

world. I am not to shut myself up in pharisaic coldness, "saluting my brethren only." I am not to be niggard in my sympathies, helping those only who may in turn help me. I am to carry out in everything the spirit of my Lord, who said, "When thou makest a feast, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee: but call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

Moreover, I am to keep down all pride and all resentment. I am to think kindly of those that most harshly judge me, and are bitter in their feelings towards me. I am to speak generously of the men that speak disparagingly of me. I am to love genuinely those that are most opposite to me in character; who are successfully out-distancing me in business or in fame; those even whose material and family interests most clash with mine, and who are vindicating at law what they suppose to be their rights against me: who have spoken cruel words about me, have slandered me, and injured me in every possible way. I am not to say "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." I am to love my enemy, to drop a branch, at least, of the sweet-smelling tree of kindness into the waters of his bitterness, if so be I can heal them, and turn his Marah into such an Elim as my own.

Still farther, I am to be absolutely superior to that party-spirit which, under the guise of a greater sanctity, does mischief everywhere. I am to be above it, so far as *my own nation* is concerned. I may be a patriot, but I am not therefore to look down on other nations with contempt. I am to be above it, so far as *my race* is concerned. The duskiest skin may enshrine a noble soul. The blackest African may have a very white heart. "God hath made all men of *one blood*," and I must not "call any man common or unclean." I am to be above it, so far as *my own religion* even is concerned. I may thank God that the true light has come to me, but I am not to laugh at the superstitions from which His mercy alone has set me free ; or to despise the dim gropings after light which can be seen in heathen lands. I am to be above it, so far as *my own ecclesiastical denomination* is concerned. I am to love all that are Christ's, be the Church in which they find their spiritual home as different from mine as it may. All pride, all jealousy, all fiery denunciation, all chilling contempt, all grudging of neighbourly help, all looking for some reward in kind before I stretch out a generous hand—all this I am to know absolutely nothing of. In my *private and personal life* there is to be a crushing down of all that pettiness of temper that would make me both ungenerous and unjust. In my *domestic life* there is to be a tenderness, forbearance, harmony beyond what

are found in ordinary homes. Family frictions are to be oiled by family love. In *my business life* there is to be a keener sense of absolute integrity than is felt by others beside me. In *my social and public life* there is to be a magnanimity that will never irritate by quick reproaches nor misrepresent an opponent's words; a generous appreciation of all that is best in those from whom I differ most. This my Master expects of me. I am to do "more than others."

This is His ideal; and a life like this it must be my aim to reach. But can I reach it? It seems too high an attainment ever to be realised. In any ordinary mood of mind I am apt to regard such teaching as this as being unduly strained and exaggerated: a very beautiful ideal, but not to be taken as a working law for the life of every day. It seems too romantic; not sufficiently homely: a rule that cannot be obeyed till the golden age of the millennium has come. I say to myself "This is more than can be expected of flesh and blood;" and that is true. But then my Master is not speaking to me as to "flesh and blood," but as to one who has been both redeemed and renewed. Do I say to myself, "this looks too much like the bondage of law, and I imagined I was free from law?" It is true that I am not under the law but under grace; yet, just because I am under grace, I should feel that to be a constraint to all practical holiness far stronger than mere law could put upon

me ; and I have, in addition, the promise of grace sufficient to help me in obeying my Master's commands. He never gives any command without a corresponding promise of help.

If I ever think that both I and the world must wait for some brighter millennial day before such a life as this can be lived by any of us, I have just to remember that, if ever such a day does come, it will be then precisely that the impossibility of fulfilling these precepts will begin ! for then there will be none who hate me and whom I must love : none who persecute me for whom I must pray. It will be impossible for me then to love my enemies, for no enemies will be left for me to love. So then, it is here and now that I must obey these precepts of my Lord ; and if they seem to demand of me a perfection of Christian feeling which it will be impossible for me to reach, let me consider that if I on that account, or on any account, refuse them, I am really rejecting Himself as the great Lord of my life ; and that I cannot have him as the *Redeemer* of my soul, unless I have Him as the *Master* of my soul as well.

This keeping of His commandments is the only *proof* of my love to Him ; and it is the *fruit* of love as well. "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them," says Jesus, "he it is that loveth Me,"—there is obedience as the *proof* of love ; but next He says, "He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings"—there is obedience as

the *fruit* of love. If I do not obey Him, I do not love Him. If I do not love Him, I *cannot* obey.

Living so high a life as this is the only way in which I can honour my Master before the world. It does not care much for religion in the *creed*; but it always respects religion in the *life*; and I am in the world as a soul redeemed, for this purpose only—to win the world's regard for my Redeemer, by what it sees in me. And what will be my reward for doing it? I can seek no greater reward than what He promises to me; that I shall thus be like God Himself; I shall be a "child of the Highest"—a true copy of "My Father who is in heaven." God loves His enemies. If He could not do that, He never would have loved *me*. My best reward for loving my enemies is that thus I am resembling Him. "To render evil for good is devil-like; to render evil for evil is beast-like; to render good for good is man-like; to render good for evil is God-like;" and what better reward, what finer honour can be mine, than to be like my God?

Alas! that my resemblance to Him is so faint! Sadly must I echo the words of a saintly man of old, who, reading the Sermon on the Mount, said, "Either these are not the precepts of Christ, or I am not a Christian." The very world that I am called to be superior to often puts me to shame. I see the great sacrifices willingly made by heathen to their false gods—I see the beauty of philanthropy in men who utterly abjure the Christian

name—I see how devotion to science can break down the barriers of social caste ; and I ask myself with shame, “ What do I *more* than others ? ” I serve a nobler Master—why should I so often show a poorer life ? Let my shame lead on to penitence, and my penitence to a new self-consecration. Let me be more evidently, by my lowly self-forgetting love, a witness to Him whose lowly self-forgetting love redeemed me for Himself.

XX

PROFESSION WITHOUT PRACTICE

“Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”
—LUKE vi. 46.

A QUESTION so sharp and piercing as this might make me think that it is meant only for those who are consciously insincere in their professions, but not for me. But on one occasion my Master said “*to His disciples first of all*, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is *hypocrisy*.” “*To His disciples first of all!*” Do they then need to be so specially warned against hypocrisy? Is that a danger to which they, *above others*, are exposed? My Lord knows what is in man. The seeds of all evil are lying dormant in the heart-soil of even the best of us, and only need favourable conditions to spring into noxious life; and these baleful seeds may often find their opportunity of life in soil that has just been cleared, though their very existence there would never be suspected.

Perhaps this may be truer of the seeds of insincerity than of some other kinds; for, as Milton says, "Hypocrisy is the only evil that walks *invisible except to God alone*." I must therefore hear my Master speaking to myself, when He puts so sharp a question as this.

For I cannot easily escape the down-dragging influences of the world round about me, which often dull the sensitiveness of my conscience, and make me excuse much that, in my better and higher moments, I feel to be inconsistent with a really whole-hearted discipleship. I see that multitudes do call Jesus Lord, and yet do not the things which He commands; and then I begin to ask myself whether I have not been interpreting His commands too strictly; and whether the same looseness of obedience which satisfies others may not be sufficient for me. I see that many follow Christ—in the Churches at least—with a profession of love to Him, and a professed acceptance of His lordship over them, who, if I do not misjudge them, are actuated by far lower considerations. I see that some call Jesus Lord for the sake of the worldly advantages they can reap by wearing the Christian name. It is an unquestionable fact that even quite worldly men have so great a faith in the genuine Christian character, that they will trust a Christian where they would not trust any one else. A worldly master will choose, by preference, a Christian servant in his home or a Christian

clerk in his business on the ground that he is likely to be served more faithfully by them than by any one else. Time was when even a negro slave, if known to be a Christian, would bring a higher price on the auction-block. But all this only leads many to put on the appearance of discipleship, and call Christ their intimate friend for the benefit of His name! Alas for the wide ruin that has frequently overtaken too confiding hearts, after entrusting their hard-won savings to the keeping of men whose profession of Christian devotedness was very loud, and who on that account were trusted to the uttermost, but showed ere long that they only "wore a cloak to deceive" and were "hypocrites" at heart!

I see, too, that some men make great profession of zeal for Christ in order to increase their reputation and advancement *in the Church*. They are but the modern representatives of the ancient Pharisees, whose zeal for religion only tried to hide their love of the praise of men. For the Bible is no collection of fossils. I am not walking through an old antiquarian museum when I pass through the Gospel galleries and look at the men who lived twenty centuries ago. I am rather in a gallery full of mirrors, each one of which gives me a reflection of myself. Both Pharisees and Sadducees are walking the world to-day. They are sometimes, both of them, walking in the secret passages of my own heart. It ought to be a very

affecting thought to me that the same eye that detected the unreality of professed religion in these ancient days must be detecting everywhere the same thing still, and may be detecting it in me; and that a man may spend a long life professedly in the service of Christ and go down to his grave lamented as though a pillar of the Church had fallen, and yet be found, when all is revealed, to have had no higher motive than to "do well to himself." The very world has often a keen eye for the inconsistency between profession and practice. It is not the genuine Christian, but the sham one that it despises and condemns. Much more does the true-hearted, genuine Master Himself: and what would be the effect if He, who once drove out of the temple all the profaners of His Father's house, should go through every congregation of worshippers to-day, removing from it all who do not follow Him *for His own sake alone*? How many a sanctuary would be left with very few worshippers indeed! In such a case would *I* be one of those left with Him? Let me look honestly and seriously into this.

Our forefathers were, perhaps, too introspective in their general religious life, sometimes morbidly so. They were always plucking up the young trees and examining the roots to see if there were really life and growth within them; and they ran a great danger of killing the tree. But we now go to the opposite extreme; and even where the leaves

are falling off and no fruit ripens we seldom think of digging deep to find out the reason which lies out of sight. This tendency of the day affects me unconsciously ; and I am too ready to take my discipleship for granted because, when all the multitude is crying "Hosanna," I cry "Hosanna" too.

If anything should be unmistakably clear to me, this ought to be, that the precepts of my Lord are absolutely opposed to nearly all the maxims of the world in which I move ; and that to serve two masters so utterly at variance must be a thing impossible. But if I "call Jesus Lord," and *do what others say* ; if I try to make the promises of Christ my comfort and the maxims of the world my rule ; if I give Christ my worship and the world my heart ; if I would retain Christ as my advocate, but make the world my friend ; if I pay Christ visits of ceremony, but feel that the world is my home ; if I say that Christ has new-fashioned me to be a child of God, but still walk according to the fashion of the world from which I profess to have been delivered ; if, for the joy of my spiritual life, I look to Christ, but for the law of my social life I look to men ; may not this piercing question from my Master's lips bring me to my knees before Him in shame and penitence and prayer ?

Let me beware of showing in myself what Bunyan has so caustically satirised in "Lord

Fairspeech," "Mr. Talkative," "Mr. Facing-both-ways," and "Parson-two-tongues." Let it never be said of me "the voice, indeed, is Jacob's voice ; but the hands are the hands of Esau." This Master of mine differs from all others in this, that He claims to be the supreme Lawgiver as well as the only Saviour ; and His rule must be absolute over my outward, as well as my inward, life. His demand of me is that I should obey Him *in everything*. It is sometimes said that His precepts cannot apply to this present day ; that the whole circumstances of society have so changed, that His rules of life cannot be carried out except at the expense of a dislocation of the whole social life of the day. But this is not a condemnation of the precepts. It is a condemnation of society. It is said, again, that if an attempt were made in business matters to carry out the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, men might as well give up business altogether. But that, too, is not a condemnation of the Sermon on the Mount : it is a condemnation of the business. Christ was legislating, not for that distant age alone, but for every age ; and if a man cannot prosper in worldly business and grow rich, too, while faithfully obeying this Master's commands, he had better cease trying to be rich at all ; and thousands of men could rise up to-day and witness against this slander upon their Lord, telling how they have found by experience that success came to them

just in proportion as they honestly carried out the whole of their great Master's law.

Yet, alas ! when I look at myself and see how small is the obedience I often give to His commands ; when I think of the poor measure in which I surrender to Him the government of my life, and not of my life only, but of my feelings and tempers and ambitions and thoughts ; when I ask myself to what extent I do really " seek first His kingdom's righteousness," letting my own ambitions sink down into their proper place, I seem to hear Him say, even as I bend before Him in secret prayer, " Why callest thou me Lord, and doest not the things which I say ? " Would that all the most secret things of my soul were under law to Him as well as the open things of my life ; and that I could feel habitually, as the old Greek sculptor felt, who, when carving carefully the back of a statue of his god for a temple niche, and being told that he needed not to be so particular about the *back*, since it would be fastened into the wall, replied, " The gods can see in the wall."

XXI

NO CROSS, NO CROWN

"What wilt thou?"—MATTHEW xx. 21.

"What would ye that I should do for you?"—MARK x. 36.

"Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?"—MATTHEW xx. 22.

A MARVELLOUSLY gentle way, surely, of rebuking the ignorant pride of these disciples, and of their ambitious mother as well! There was no harshness in the Master's tone, either to her or to them. I do not wonder at His exceeding gentleness to *her*, for in the whole gospels I do not read that He ever spoke harshly *to a woman*; and then, she was a mother, and He knows the mother-heart. But I do wonder at His great gentleness with her place-hunting sons. I would not have been surprised if He had then and there indignantly exposed their presumption to the gaze of all, tearing off their masks, and revealing all that *He* saw in their foolish hearts. But He only shows

them an infinite pity—"Ye know not what ye ask."

No doubt there was something better in them than coarse self-seeking, and He saw and appreciated the kernel of good that lay within the husk of their ambition—a real faith in His coming glory, a real love to Himself, and a real desire to be always as near to Him as they could get. But after all it was not just their own nearness to Him that fired their hearts. It was the wish for a nearness more intimate than any of the other disciples would enjoy. It was not just nearness of *affection*, but rather nearness of *position* in the coming kingdom—such a nearness as would mark them out as special favourites of the King. They had not the face to put it exactly in that way. To come out with the naked truth, in all its shamelessness, would have been too much even for them; and they seem to have had a dim sort of consciousness that there was something wrong, for they put their request at first in very general terms, "We would that Thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire." They wished to catch the Master, and bind Him beforehand by a trick. "Surely," they say, "it cannot be supposed that *we* would ask anything wrong!" This way of putting it, however, only showed how utterly unfit for any high place in a kingdom of *truth* they were, as a little before they had shown their unfitness for any power in a kingdom of *love*. A few poor Samari-

tan villagers had churlishly refused their Master a welcome as He passed ; and instantly these " Sons of Thunder " were for calling down fire from heaven to consume them ! " Alas," said the pitying Christ, " ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." In the same way He answers them now : " Rulers in My kingdom you wish to be ! So fully convinced of your fitness to rule that you would pledge Me beforehand to give you its highest seats ! Beautiful rulers of My kingdom of love and peace you would be, with your fire from heaven ! Quite able, as you think, to reign with Me, are you able first to suffer with Me ? Can you gladly crucify yourselves, like Me, and stoop to intensest agony and lowest shame, that out of these you may rise, like Me, to a kingdom and a throne ? " He knew them better than they knew themselves, for only a few days more and they failed outright. It would not have been so wonderful if they had fainted in drinking their own cup ; but they fainted at the very sight of Him drinking His.

I would listen, therefore, to this question of my Lord's whenever, growing discontented with my allotted place or work, I am eagerly reaching out my hands to grasp what may satisfy an unholy ambition. All hands are not steady enough to carry a full cup. All hearts are not humble enough to be entrusted with great power. There is not a Christian living to whom the complete management of even a very small portion of the

Master's kingdom could be safely committed for a single day. When Augustine was asked what is the first thing in the Christian life, he replied, "Humility"; asked what, then, was the second, he said "Humility"; and asked what the third is, to that also he replied "Humility." Most rightly so; for though I carried all other Christian graces in my heart, and lacked humility, I would be like one who carries a precious powder in a box without a cover on a windy day. No one ever said, "Master, give me the highest place," whose soul was not thereby evidenced to be full of that foolish pride that always precedes a fall.

I must remember, too, that the honours of the kingdom do not go by favouritism. They need to be won, and they cannot be cheaply won. They are won by long endurances, many sufferings, hard self-crucifixions, bitter tears. When one of Napoleon's generals asked him for a marshal's baton, "It is not I," said Napoleon, "that make marshals; it is victory." So says the great Captain of Salvation too. The prize is "to him that overcomes." It is not the mere camp-follower, neither is it the man who is a soldier only on parade; it is the conqueror in hard fight who shall sit upon the throne beside his conquering Lord. If I wish to be a white-robed palm-bearer before the throne on high, I must first be a blood-bespattered sword-bearer in many a conflict here. Even Christ Himself cannot change that law. If,

by a mere act of good-will, He could raise every one of His disciples to a throne, His love and grace are great enough to do it; but the law of spiritual gravitation is absolute. In a very deep sense every man goes "to his own place"—the only place for which he is fit. If the Christ-spirit is more perfect in me, and the Christ-life fuller in me than they are in some beside me, I *shall* have a greater nearness to my Lord, both here and hereafter too. But not otherwise. He has no favourites. There is no such thing as arbitrary selections and preferences in His kingdom. And really Christ-filled souls *never* lust for rank or distinction of any kind. They only desire to be like Him in humble service. That gives them the only nearness they seek. He is the Highest because He made Himself the lowest. He is on heaven's throne because first He stooped to Bethlehem's manger and Calvary's Cross. He is Lord of all because, first, He became servant to all. In me, too, self-humbling and even self-crucifixion can alone prepare for or ensure the honour that is eternal.

Therefore it is that He comes to me and says, "You want to be made a great saint, and think you have only to ask for that, and the saintliness will be given you at once; nay, but are you willing to have the heavy trials, the long temptations, and the slow, patient victories, by which alone great saints are made? You would fain be, like Jacob, a prince with God, but are you prepared to wrestle

for your principedom till you go halting on the thigh? You ask for a very full assurance of God's love, a brightness of faith that no cloud can dim. Well, are you willing to be deprived of the whole sunshine of your world-life first, that in the darkness you may see the stars which day conceals?" Self-sacrifice looks a God-like thing in Jesus Christ—a noble thing in Paul; but—in *myself*? Ah, there it often looks too hard to be endured!

For, besides the difficulty of beginning such a life, there is the further difficulty of *continuing* in it, even when it grows harder with the years. When Jesus said to His disciples, "Ye are they who *have* continued with Me in My temptations, and I appoint to you a kingdom as My Father hath appointed unto Me," they seem to have imagined that the whole of the warfare was past; and so He needed to add that the throne was for those that followed Him, not only in what they had already given up, but in what they would still have to bear. "My baptism of blood," He said, "is before Me yet; will you share it? You have *left* all, but will you *bear* all? You have given up *your own* cup of earthly joy, will you drink *My* cup of earthly suffering too?" The inexorable law for all disciples is this: if no cup, no kingdom; if no baptism, no throne; if no Bethany (the house of sorrow), no Jerusalem (the vision of peace). James never thought he would have suffering to pass through ere his crown was won—suffering that made him

fall a martyr for his Lord beneath Herod's sword. John never calculated on long years of banishment on Patmos ere he should see the chariot that would take him home. But, by things they did *not* desire, they reached the thing they *did* desire, and, like thousands more, they found their everlasting profit in the losing of their prayers.

Well will it be for me if, when any lusting after high things stirs in me, I hear my Master reminding me that the only high things it is safe for me to seek are the high attainments of holy feeling, holy living, and holy fellowship with Him. These best gifts I may covet earnestly, for against this kind of covetousness there is no law. I am safe in wishing to be as a star that excels in glory, if only I mean by that, to be a bright reflector of the image of my Lord.

XXII

SWORD AND FIRE

"I am come to send fire on the earth ; and what will I, if it be already kindled ?"—LUKE xii. 49.

"Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth ? I tell you, Nay ; but rather division."—LUKE xii. 51.

I CAN easily understand the astonishment of the disciples as they heard their Master unfold, in varying phrase and metaphor, the terrible dangers lying in front of them—dangers on which they had not calculated when they began to follow Him. I can imagine this astonishment expressing itself in their very looks, till Jesus, seeing it, only emphasised the warnings already given : "Have you really been supposing that such a mission as Mine will leave the world to slumber on in peace ? Have you really been thinking of a bright and easy path to victory ? I tell you, Nay ; peace is only the far-off issue ; the nearer issues will be strife and war." It must have come upon them as a terrible disenchantment, this picture of the enmities and

commotions that would inevitably be produced by His great cleansing and redeeming work. Yet His forewarnings were the forewarnings of love, a love that would not let them be taken by surprise when all unprepared.

But could there be a more striking proof of the searching character of His gospel than is given in these questions of His? The Gospel that would eventually destroy the world's strifes would begin by kindling fiercer discords than it cured. Hallowing and beautifying all human relationships eventually, it would begin by rending asunder even the sacrest of all. It would be like the new wine which bursts the old bottles; the cleansing fire which first turns corruption into a blazing wreck; the terrible tornado which is needed to sweep pestilence away, before the fever-smitten world can be brought back to joyous health. For Christ must always be a great Destroyer before He is a great Restorer; and the Lord is not afraid of the storm of frenzied opposition which He stirs in the earth. To timid and ignorant men, the strifes and hatreds occasioned by His gospel seem only *death-pains*, and they cry out that all is lost. To Him, they are only *birth-pains*, through which the glorious, golden future is being born. They only show "the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God."

In this question of my Master's, therefore, I find

what I often greatly need—a corrective to the desponding thoughts occasioned by witnessing the slow progress of His kingdom upon earth. He gives me here a key to what is most perplexing and discouraging in the history of the Church. In looking at the world still, I am to see only the process of preparation, not the grand result; and since I can see that the *process* exactly corresponds to His predictions I can be sure that the predicted *end* of the process will also come. All the commotions of the world are only parts of His plan and “the end is not yet.” In ever-varying ways the world is seeking to be its own Messiah, for men *will* try their own ways before settling humbly and gladly to God’s; they try their best to make their own Messiah’s kingdom before they will accept the Lord’s. But as each of its efforts in succession fails I know that it will soon be at the end of all *its* resources and be ready for the long-rejected, patiently-waiting Christ, whom it will at last accept as its King of Righteousness and King of Peace.

So I am not “disturbed or shaken in mind” by what I daily read and hear of the enmities excited by His gospel in heathen lands, or of the outcries raised at home against all who would stand forth for God, and fight the cold self-interest and greed of gain that so bitterly oppose every effort to purify either national or social or domestic life. This is only a proof to me that my Master’s words are

being verified, and *that* assures me that His other words about the ultimate victory of truth and righteousness will be verified as well. What if God is only slowly developing a far-reaching plan by which He will make the world *sick* of its follies, *weary* of its strifes and sins, and so wean it from them all and draw it to Himself? Every coming of Christ seems in its process to contradict its result. The devil dies hard, always. When the evil spirit was exorcised by Christ's omnipotent voice, it tore the man from whom it was about to go—tore him by a worse paroxysm than ever, seeking to kill him in the very act of leaving him. That is often seen, both in the healing of the individual soul, and in the healing of the world at large. Wherever Christ comes, He comes by processes that seem to contradict the very purpose of His coming. I must therefore "judge nothing before the time." *When* the Lord cometh He will show that all has been done in the only way it could be done, for *permanent* blessing to men and *eternal* glory to Himself.

I can find here, too, a probable reason for many "overturnings" in my own personal life; for there must be a breaking up of all *delusive* peace that I may find the *true*. I cannot enter the kingdom of peace except through "tribulation" of some kind—tribulation outwardly or tribulation inwardly—tribulation that seems at its coming to portend only disaster and ruin. I needed once the sharp

sword of the Spirit to cut deep into my proud self-righteousness and lay bare the secrets of my soul. I still need the fire of trial to purge away my earthliness and burn up corruption within me; for if "a man's foes are those of his own *household*," his very worst foes are those of his own *heart*; and only by a complete overturning there, can the way be prepared for Christ to reign as the Lord of my life, and bring His own blessed purity and peace into me for ever.

Then, as to God's dealings with me in the outward things of my life, there is nothing strange in the fact that they should often be like fire and sword, if the issue of them is to be the joy of holiness and the vigour of spiritual health. I speak too often of the "mysteriousness" of suffering; for, any mysteriousness that may be in it arises from this alone, that my will and God's will, my aim and God's aim, do not run together, but are opposed to each other at every point. If I am planning and working for one thing, and God is planning and working for a wholly different thing, there must be trouble and collision as the result. If I make it my chief aim to be successful in the world, to get out of it what it can yield of comfort to me, to gratify as far as I can all my natural likings, to pass as pleasantly as I can through my threescore years and ten, leaving all higher considerations completely out of view; and God is wishful to make me rather fall in with *His* idea of

what my chief end in life should be, viz., to glorify Him by an obedient spirit and make these earthly years a preparation for the service of the everlasting ages, these are two completely opposite schemes of life, and it is no wonder that when they clash there should be trouble and unrest. But there is no "mystery" in it. The trouble is inevitable so long as my will and God's will do not run together. All those sharp dealings with me that make the world less attractive and God more ; those strokes of His that, just when I have filled my cup and am about to drink it, dash it suddenly from my lips ; that, just when I have made my golden calf and am about to worship it, shatter it in pieces before my eyes ; that, just when I have settled comfortably, saying, "Soul, take thine ease," desolate my home and overturn my happiness at a blow—all these things, mysterious, perhaps, if only my earthly peace comes into view, are easily accounted for when I see that it is not my earthly peace that God is working for, but a peace more satisfying, more pure, more lasting by far ; and so I learn to welcome the "sword" that slays my selfishness and the "fire" that purges my sin, for I know that God's "thoughts towards me are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give me *His* expected end." Would that I could make it my honest prayer that this purifying process may go on till it is complete !

Then, as to the coming of His kingdom in the

world at large, let me ask myself if I enter sufficiently into the intense eagerness of my Lord to see that established everywhere at whatever cost. Let me ponder His words, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how is my soul straitened till it be accomplished?" "Oh, that this destroying yet purifying fire were kindled everywhere and burning everywhere to-day!" Do *I* so long for the reign of purity? Am *I* as willing to suffer if only it can be hastened? Is the sin and misery of the world as great a burden on *my* heart as they were on His? Can I send the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," like a fire-ball crashing through all my own ambitions, and burning up whatever stands in that kingdom's way? It is a searching question; let me not shrink from putting it—am I not *willing* merely, but *eager* for that kingdom's coming and ready to suffer anything in order to bring it nigh? Oh! to be more like Him, both in His zeal for God and in His love to men!

XXIII

DELAY IS NOT DENIAL

“ Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them ? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth ? ”—LUKE xviii. 7, 8.

It can hardly be doubted that the Master was speaking here, not so much of prayer for personal and private need, as of prayer for the coming of His kingdom in the earth. This, therefore, is His encouragement to me to continue steadfastly in *intercessory* prayer. He tells me that, though I am to be “ always ready, not knowing what hour my Lord may come,” I am not to be disheartened or dismayed if His coming is long delayed, or if He seems to turn a deaf ear to my importunate cry ; for the incessant cry *will* bring a glorious answer, which may come “ speedily,” or, as His Word seems to mean, “ suddenly,” when least expected, and with an overwhelming power pro-

portioned to the length of the delay. So I am "always to pray, and not to faint."

I must stir up my heart to take a larger share in this kind of prayer than I have been accustomed to do. The glory of my Lord demands this. The command of my Lord impels to this. The interests of my own soul are bound up with this. I cannot expect large answers to my private prayers if I forget the interests of my Lord in other souls than my own. Self-centredness in prayer is as hurtful as selfishness in anything else.

It was said of Christ in ancient prophecy "prayer shall be made for him continually." It is a wonderful honour given to me, that I should *pray for Christ*, as much as He prays for *me*; and yet how little in this do I resemble Him! There is no work I can do on earth more like the great work He is doing in heaven; for "He ever liveth to make intercession." When I pray for the sinful that they may be converted to God, I am imitating Him who said, "let it alone this year also, and if it bear fruit, well." When I pray for relatives and friends, I can speak of them as He did who prayed for "those whom thou hast given me." When I pray for the holiness of the Church, I am only echoing the great high-priestly prayers of the seventeenth of John. It was said of Him "He shall not fail, *nor be discouraged*, till He have set judgment in the earth." Surely I am likest Him when *I* pray undiscouraged, too; and here

on earth keep on, as He does in heaven, "*expecting* till His enemies be made His footstool." Would that I could imitate more closely the unresting but unhurrying, always working and always interceding Christ! But I cannot say what Thomas Scott once said, "the duty of intercession is that one in which I have failed the least;" for it is perhaps that in which I, and most disciples, fail the most.

To help me to it, let me remember three things: first, that Christ Himself has shown me the order in which my prayers should move, by teaching me to put first "Thy name be hallowed, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven," and only after that, "give me my daily bread, forgive me my sins." Surely I am wrong when I put that last which He puts first, and make those things my chief petitions which He makes only secondary ones. Secondly, that Bible records show God honouring intercessory prayer by larger answers than those given to personal ones, and perhaps for this reason, that there is less of selfishness in them. Thirdly, that every great revival in the Churches has begun in intercessory prayer, and been sustained by that all through. Never has there been a great revival or advance, but intensified persevering prayer has ushered it in. Never has there been this interceding prayer, but revival has come as the answer to it. Franklin hit the truth when he said, "Kindle the dry sticks

and the green will catch." If the Church is kindled, the world will be; and the kindling comes by prayer.

It does seem distressingly slow work, this work of winning the world for Christ by effort and prayer. To any other eye than the eye of faith it must look hopeless work; for only the spell of a delusive optimism can prevent me being appalled at the real condition of the world; a thousand millions of the race still strangers to any form of Christianity; two-thirds of nominal Christendom lapsed into an apostasy hardly better than paganism; and of the remaining third only a meagre proportion really spiritual Christians. If I look at the small results gained in the centuries that are past, and then begin to calculate how long, at the same rate of progress, the victory of Christ will be delayed, there is little left for me but despair.

But my Master's words encourage me. *His* "speedily" may not be mine, if to Him a thousand years are as one day is to me. The crowning victory *may* be only on the horizon yet. Still, He has Himself anticipated all my doubts by going to the right hand of power, and pleading there as he asks me to keep pleading here. If I make the fact that past prayers have not been answered a reason for ceasing to pray any more, that would only prove that the past praying had not been the praying of *faith*. To real faith, the

delay of the answer is only an evidence that the moment for answering *is nearer than it was*.

It is good to be grieved that God is still so widely dishonoured as He is. He still sets His "mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the city." It is good to be thus in sympathy with His own feelings of grief over the sins of men. But if it is good to "sigh," it is better still to *pray*. The "sighing" is a thing that ends with itself. The "praying" begins the restoration. And the prayer that brings the blessing must be prayer that is not afraid to ask *great* things from God ; that does not think it is asking too much, when it asks *all* that the promises of God contain, *all* that the merits of Christ have purchased, *all* that the Father's infinite love can bestow. It is my Christian privilege and my Christian duty in one, to be so emphatically and perseveringly a "remembrancer of God," that before I have passed away from life below, I shall have prayed *often, specifically, and by name*, for every friend I have on earth, for every interest of Christ in any land, and for every nation, country, tribe that the great world contains. Intercession should be as an atmosphere that bathes me every hour. When I read the news of the day, and am saddened by the ever-recurring tale of crime, and vice, and misery, and sin, in every city, and almost every village of the land, why should not a silent prayer accompany the reading that

grieves my heart? When writing to an absent friend, why should not my letter be sealed with a prayer? When passing along the street, witnessing some act of cruelty, hearing some swearer's oath, marking some drunkard's reeling steps, why should I not instantly pray for these sinful ones as well as mentally condemn them? Even when seated in the house of prayer, why should not supplication for those beside me there, for the preacher, that power from on high may accompany his word, for the hearers, that a bow drawn at a venture may find its mark, be going up to God from me, unknown to any one else? would not my own soul thus grow into a truer fellowship with my Master? Would I not myself grow much in tenderness and in zeal?

The Lord's closing question, when speaking about prayer, not, perhaps, addressed to the disciples so much as to Himself—a soliloquy rather than a question—"nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" suggests the sad possibility that a faith such as will keep on, praying and expecting in the face of every delay, will almost have disappeared from His disciples' hearts, before the great hour strikes in which all past prayers will be answered to the full. It is a pious imagination that both the world and the Church will grow gradually better before the appearing of the Lord. He Himself does not seem so to think. He rather hints that the last days may

be the worst, that faith in His promise will almost disappear, that the world will be more madly defiant than ever, as in the old days of Noah before the Flood ; and that His disciples will be fewer and more discouraged than ever, just before He comes to "avenge His own elect," and answer the cries of centuries. His word "speedily" should rather be translated "suddenly"; and hints at His coming being of the nature of an *unexpected*, as well as an *overwhelming* blow. Just when all the world is saying "where is the promise of His coming?" He will arise, and show Himself, and the light of His face will be as a judgment-sword. I need not, therefore, be alarmed when things seem to be only growing worse ; I know by that that His coming must be nigh, and I will be *one* at least of His "remembrancers" who "give Him no rest" till He has set up His glorious kingdom everywhere, as He alone can do.

XXIV

BLINDNESS

“Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?”—LUKE vi. 39.

A QUESTION this that came out of the Lord's deep *pity* for the rejectors of His words. There was nothing in it of superciliousness. There was only an infinite compassion. The disciples, officious and fussy as usual, said to Him, “Knowest Thou that the Pharisees were greatly offended by that saying of Thine about defilement of the soul being a much more serious thing than defilement of the hands?” Poor simple souls! They were going to teach their Master caution! They were afraid He was becoming too outspoken, and too regardless of the possible consequences of denouncing pharisaic hypocrisy as He did. They hinted that it was not wise, or safe, to excite enmity in that way; and would seem to have suggested that He should do something to conciliate these proud

rejectors of the truth; should soften down the truth a little, and take off the keenness of its edge; for the Master said, "No, let them alone; it is not conciliation they need, it is opened eyes: they are utterly blind, and yet profess to be leaders and guides; and they are accepted as such, because the men that defer so to their leading are as blind as themselves. I pity them for it; but their anger does not touch Me in the least. I know the secret of it—they know not what they do: they count God's wisdom foolishness because they have not the seeing eye."

I cannot but note, in this, my Master's sublime indifference to the opinion of men: but I note, too, that underneath that there was an infinite compassion; and I would need to be very Christ-like in this pity, before I can venture to take that attitude of calm indifference to the opinion of the world about me. Nothing is easier than to assume an attitude of superiority to the opinion of other men, in mere self-complacent pride. If I am encased in a lofty conceit of my own superior insight, and have an egotistical idea of my superior knowledge, I may too easily call myself a "defender of the faith," while I am only a defender of my own self-importance. I need much of my Master's humility, and much of His divine compassion too, before I can adopt His tone of calm indifference to what the world may say of me. Before I condemn the blindness of others, I

must be very sure that I myself do see: but, having my Master's spirit, I may be as careless about the world's anger as my Master was.

Let me seriously ponder my own need of a thoroughly-opened eye if I am not to be what He condemned, "a blind leader of the blind." I may be called to be a preacher of divine truth: I may be a teacher of the young; I may be a parent, called to instruct my children in the things of God; I may be simply one friend giving advice to another in some perplexity of conscience, some difficulty of faith, some doubt as to the path of duty. In any of these capacities it is sadly possible that I may only lead astray, unless I myself am unmistakably and consciously and continually taught of God. For even the smallest of these things I need wisdom from on high, since a mistake of mine may be most seriously hurtful to other souls. Mistakes in lower matters than these may be trivial, however great the loss thereby incurred, compared with mistakes in matters of the soul. Mistaken advice on some matter of worldly business may be fraught with consequences deplorable enough, if, in these, I am a "blind leader of the blind." My unwise and incompetent advice may lead a trustful friend to bankruptcy. Mistaken advice even in questions of science, or literature, or art—the advice of an incompetent guide—may be serious too in many of its effects. Yet these are only trifles compared

with the danger of misleading souls in the matter of their relations to God. In this region my blindness may be absolutely fatal: and I must seek, therefore, daily, the clear vision of a Spirit-opened eye.

Having that, I may comfort myself with the thought that, if my report of what I see is rejected by those that cannot see, I am faring no worse than my great Master did. Like Him, I may "possess my soul in patience," and pity the blindness that I cannot cure. For the world is blind to the things of God. "It receiveth them not, neither can it know them, for they are only spiritually discerned." Only spiritually-minded men can see spiritual things. It is as true to-day as it was twenty centuries ago that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not." The reason why they are "alienated from the *life* of God" is the "ignorance that is in them, through the blindness of their *hearts*." Clear *intellect* and a blinded *heart* may sometimes go together: but really, in the things of God, if the heart is blinded the intellect is blinded too. The brightest genius, able to see with marvellous penetration into the secrets of creation, will be utterly blind to the mysteries of grace and godliness, if unenlightened with the Light of Life: like the great Earl of Chatham, who, after listening to a sermon by Richard Cecil on the agency of the Holy Spirit upon the believer's soul, declared

he could not in the least understand what the preacher meant; and, asking if there were any in the congregation who did understand it, was surprised to be told of poor, unlettered men and women to whom it was all not only completely clear, but also a message of purest joy.

I may possibly be able to remember the time when these things were mysteries to myself: when I almost ridiculed the truth I was then too blind to see. Let me, therefore, be tender with the blinded world around me; and only pray that its eyes may be opened, as mine needed to be, to see the glory of what it despises now. My own truest life is "hid," and cannot be understood by unspiritual men. The sustenance of my soul is a "hidden manna." I have "meat to eat that the world knows nothing of." The "name on the white stone" is one that "no man knoweth save he that receiveth it." "The world knoweth us not, because it knows Him not"; and I cannot make the world see the secret that makes my life so wholly different from its own. I cannot even describe it: for the very language I would need to use would be as unintelligible to the unspiritual as a foreign tongue. My secret joys and my hidden sorrows are alike mysterious to them. My lamentations over sin in myself and in others, and my raptures of joy over fellowship with God, are utterly strange to them. They hear me speak of them, and cannot understand what I would be at.

The strength and comfort I find in prayer they know nothing of, for prayer to them is only a dreary and useless formality. When I talk to them about the sanctification of the Sabbath, it is nearly impossible to get from them the slightest sign of any true appreciation of the blessedness of a day devoted to higher communion of spirit with God. To them it is only a weariness for which they must seek distraction. Any sacrifices I make willingly for Christ are foolishness to them. My resolute abstention from all that would be inconsistent with the will of an invisible Master they call ridiculous scrupulosity or bigotry. What appears to me only simple obedience to God's holy will they deride as a "being righteous overmuch." They "think it strange that I do not run with them in the same excesses in which they find their pleasure"; strange, because they cannot so much as comprehend feelings and ambitions higher than their own. The reason of it all is this, that they are "blind." I will not be angry with them, or even greatly surprised. I will only pity them, and pray that they may see. It is not more light that the world needs: there is plenty of light. It is an opened eye to see it. Light is the remedy for *darkness*, not for *blindness*. Heaven's light may be condensed into a point of surpassing brilliance by a burning-glass; but if a blind eye is exposed to it not a whit will that eye see: it will only be consumed. It ought to be my

daily prayer for myself, "Lord, that my eyes be opened"; and my daily prayer for the world too. "What a pitiable condition," says one, "is the world in! *its own guide*, and *that guide stark blind!*"

XXV

THOUGHT-READING

“What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?”—
MARK ix. 33.

THIS was not a question for *information*, but for *conviction*. The Master had been going on before, preoccupied with greater things; and the disciples, lingering behind Him and knowing He was too far off to overhear them, began a talk which they fancied would remain a secret among themselves. How taken aback they must have been by His sudden question as they sat together in the house, “What was it you disputed about on the way?” They “held their peace”; and no wonder. Shame sealed their lips. But He did not need to wait till He was told. He showed them in a moment that He had been reading them all the time. His action here reminds me of Elisha when his servant Gehazi ran after Naaman to get from him the reward his master had refused

to take, and returning, stood before his master unabashed. "Went not mine heart with thee," said the prophet, "when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?" and then proceeded to tell the astonished servant all that had been in his thoughts as he came back, "buying olive-yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants and women-servants," with the product of his sixfold lie. "Thought-reading" with a vengeance, that!

But this is how I must think of *my* Master too. I like to feel that He is a gracious, tender, pitying one; but do I think sufficiently of Him as a keen heart-searching one as well? I like to think of His eyes as eyes of compassion, eyes that wept, eyes from which tears of sympathy dropped at Bethany, and tears of sorrow on Olivet as He gazed down upon the doomed Jerusalem. But what a holy heart-reader too He is! "His eyes are as a flame of fire." For three-and-thirty years He walked about the world, an unsuspected reader of all the thoughts and feelings of every one in the crowds that met or followed Him. Even His disciples little knew the sharpness of the glance that pierced all the motives and ambitions of their souls. How terribly disconcerting it would have been to them had they known that their Master's eye was always looking them through and through! How terrible it would have been to Judas had he known that all his base

treachery had been detected by that eye as soon as it was conceived! How disconcerting to Peter had he realised that his base cowardice had been detected before a single word of denial had passed his lips! How great a blow it would have been to James and John had they suspected that their proud ambition had been seen by their Master's eye, before the least suspicion of it had occurred to any of their brethren!

But this thought-reading, heart-searching Christ is looking *me* through every day as clearly as He looked through any of *them*. Surely, if I only realised that fact I would be holier than I am. Alas! my Master's omniscience is often to me a doctrine only, and not a reality. It has a place in my *creed* but hardly any in my *conscience*. If "every imagination of the thoughts of my heart" is known to Him as soon as it is known to myself, it is a marvel of divine mercy that He bears with me as He does, or suffers me to remain in His discipleship for a single day!

Most men prize the seclusion of *home* because there they are so greatly free from the scrutiny of unfriendly eyes; and in their own *private chamber* in that home they feel more secluded still. It is a relief to them to be able to retreat to it and feel that *there* there is not a single spectator watching them. They have, perhaps, some little secret plans which they can ripen there, some private hobbies which they can cultivate there, some

invention which they can perfect there, or they can read books there which they would be half ashamed to be seen reading publicly; they can gratify there any secret craving they may have for intoxicating drink. Something or other, whether lawful or sinful, makes that secret chamber free from prying eyes, a luxury or a relief. If I ever feel so, let me remember that, strictly speaking, I have never a single hour of such seclusion. I am always watched. All that I even think there is completely known. And known to whom? It would be a terrible enough answer to that question if it were only this, "*to the holy dead*": if I should see those who have passed on within the veil looking down on me, and reading me as they could never do before; if I should think of a father, a mother, a husband, a wife who died believing in my truth and purity, now seeing me with the mask torn off. Yet if these were the only spectators looking me through and through, their inspection could be endured somehow. If the spectators were even *holy angels*, that also could be endured. But the Witness of my most secret life, who is every moment reading me as an open book, is *the Christ* whom I profess to follow, the Christ whom I profess to love above all, the Christ who died for me on very purpose to have me as true and pure as He Himself is, my Saviour and my Master in one. Must not His look, as He sees my heart-faithlessness and sin, be

a look of the same kind as He cast on Peter in the judgment-hall when that poor disciple had so cruelly denied Him—a look, not of mere scrutiny, nor of anger, nor of regret, but of wounded affection ; the grieved look of one who is experiencing the keen agony of witnessing the utter faithlessness of a friend who had often professed to be the truest friend He had.

How many a crime would have been prevented had even the eye of a child been in the room or on the paper when the act was done ! Should the eye of a child have such power as that, and my Master's eye have no such deterrent power over me ? When Latimer was being examined before Bishop Bonner, at first he answered somewhat carelessly ; but, hearing the rustling of a pen behind the tapestry on the wall, and perceiving that all his words in what he thought a secret chamber were being taken down, he became much more prudent and cautious in his replies. Oh for a more constant sense of the invisible pen in the invisible hand of Him who, though behind the veil, has eyes that pierce not only it, but my own heart too, who too often live as though I were unwatched by any except myself !

The thought of His unsleeping eye ever *watching over me* is comforting enough ; but how do I feel about the inspection of an unsleeping eye that is always *looking into me* ? That might well be a terror to me as it was to the prisoner in the

narrow cell which had one small opening in the door behind which a sentry stood, whose eye was never taken off the prisoner for a moment, night or day. At first it was only a trifling annoyance, but as days and weeks wore on, it became an intolerable torture to the mind; for that glaring eye pursued him round the cell; it was never shut and never turned away; its glare became an agony, and led to madness in the end. The eye of the invisible Christ is as truly ever upon me. Dislike it as I may, that remains a fact. Let me realise it as a fact, and live so that I shall not fear its glance. If there are thoughts in my mind, at which, when I realise what they mean, I myself would blush; emotions of the heart at which I tremble and recoil; movements of will that alarm me because I see what a deep depravity they reveal, how much more would I be ashamed, if I but remembered, "*Thou* understandest my thoughts afar off," or heard my God say to me, "I know the thoughts that come into your mind, *every one of them*"? Let me ask, therefore, what the eye of my Master sees in my heart to-day: faith or faithlessness? love or coldness? a striving after nobler things, or contented declension? He sees every motive actuating me, every feeling that sways me. How much, then, does He see done from love to Him? how much from love to myself? how much for the sake of winning the praise of men? how much from a concern for the glory of God? Is the look He

bends on me to-day a look of *sorrow* for my worldliness, of *surprise* at my unsteadfastness, of *grief* for my forgotten vows? or is it one of *approval* for my constancy, of *encouragement* for my timidity, of *love* for my true though imperfect love to Him?

If in answering such questions I am covered with shame, and shrink from the glance that reveals my sin, let *the place into which I shrink* be the shadow of the cross. An infinite atonement alone can comfort me when I really see myself. But the Holy One is the Forgiving One, and is "ready to forgive." Let me tell Him all, and then He will show me the riches of His grace. But sin must be confessed by the sinner before it is pardoned by the Judge. It is only when I deal honestly with my sin that God deals tenderly with me.

XXVI

UNTHANKFULNESS

“Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine?”—LUKE xvii. 17.

WHAT chiefly impresses the listener here is not the wonderful exhibition of the Lord's *power*, in healing these lepers without a touch, without any outward sign, without even a word commanding the disease to depart; nor His equally wonderful *Omniscience*, His certainty that, on their way to the priests, the cure had actually taken place: but rather His grieved *disappointment*, arising from the unthankfulness of the healed. Accustomed though He had long been to the ingratitude of men, this new exhibition of it went to His heart. He wanted no honour for Himself. It was His Father's honour He was concerned about. He did not say, “there hath not returned *to thank Me*, except this stranger”; but “there hath not returned *to give glory to God*.” It was “the

Father dwelling in Him who did the works"; and to see Him dishonoured by "His own," while an outsider, a Samaritan, gave instant thanks, was a sharper sorrow to the Lord than any despite to Himself. This thanklessness of the healed was one of the many "sufferings of Christ"; and yet how meekly He took it! The harshest thing He said about it was only "Where are the nine?"

I, too, am amazed they did not hurry back, like the one Samaritan, to throw themselves gratefully at their great Healer's feet. Perhaps what held them back was fear of the priests, who were angry enough at Christ already, and would not hesitate to vent their rage on any who spoke well of Him, a rage which the Samaritan stranger could afford to despise; or possibly they may have said to themselves, "Time enough for thanks when we have first proved the permanence of the cure"; or perhaps, like thousands everywhere, they were so full of the thought of now being able to get back to their homes and businesses, so absorbed by recalling their happy past, and visioning a still happier future, that they had no further thought to spare for the gracious One who had set them free. But I seem to see a truer reason for it still. The *nine* had thought only of His wonderful *power*. The poor, despised *Samaritan* thought also of His deep compassionating *love*, a love that pitied and healed *even him*; and it is love alone that ever leads to thankfulness. There

was no sense of obligation in the nine. They almost felt that, being Jews, they had a sort of claim to any blessing that others of Israel were receiving at this Prophet's hands. The poor Samaritan could claim nothing, and his sense of obligation was all the deeper for that.

This feeling in the nine is not yet extinct among men, though it takes a slightly different form. It is one of the cant phrases of our day that every man, be his personal character and habits what they may, has a right to live, and to live in the enjoyment of what he calls a living wage; and that if he cannot get that for himself, the State must provide it for him. Essentially this is pure irreligion, and proud irreligion too; for when analysed it makes God the debtor and man the creditor, who may say to God, "Pay me that Thou owest." No man ever comes into his right position as a sinner before God till he feels himself *worthy of nothing*, and is therefore *thankful for anything*. Jacob's way of it was the only befitting way, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant." I may have rights as against my brother man, but I have no rights as against my God. I can only be an everlasting bankrupt debtor to His free love.

Well, I condemn these unthankful nine; but let me ask if I am not too like them myself. Mercy infinitely larger and more wonderful than they received, has come from my God's hands to

me. Blessing upon blessing has been falling over me, not for one day merely, but all my life through. I am "crowned with his loving-kindness and tender mercy." "I cannot reckon up in order His benefits: if I should declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." Yet where has there been any thankfulness or thanksgiving in me commensurate to these countless gifts from Him? If He were to show me, as He alone could do, the *whole* of the "great goodness" with which He has been enriching me ever since I was born, my life would seem only one great golden chain of mercies, link clasping link, each hour a link, and each day lengthening the chain, a chain of blessings all undeserved, but all most generously given. And yet, must not His verdict upon me be that sad one passed upon King Hezekiah, "He rendered not again according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was lifted up"?

I am not only indebted to a *Father's care*, I am indebted also to a *Saviour's grace*: a most compassionate Saviour, who brings me better than all earthly gifts, who brings me pardon, healing, life within; whose hand of love holds out to me bright hope and heavenly comfort, rest, holiness, and peace; a cleansing of my soul from its foul leprosy of sin; the new health that is only the beginning of a health that will last for ever. I may well say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

But “*all* His benefits”?—how shall I set them down? In any attempted enumeration of them I would know neither where to begin, nor how to end. “What shall I render to my Lord for all these benefits of His grace, so infinitely grander than the best blessings of His earthly care? The only coin I can pay Him in is that which comes from His own mint. I can give to Him only what He first gives to me, but I will try to pay Him in the only way He wants—*by the praise of a devoted life*; for if *thanksgiving* is good, *thanksgiving* is better still. My Lord has kept nothing back from me; I will keep nothing back from Him. My Lord gave His whole life for me; I will give my whole life to Him. My Lord died *for* sin; I will die *to* sin, for His dear sake. He rose from the grave for me; I will rise out of the dead things of the world for Him, and “walk in newness of life.” He *showed* Himself alive from the dead; I will show openly that I am risen in Him. He is working for me still, using the “all power” given Him, in my behalf; He is preparing a place for me; I will work for Him, I will use all *my* power in His behalf, I will prepare a larger and worthier place for Him in this heart of mine. He is ever interceding for me, I will ever intercede for Him; I will bear His interests on my heart, as He is bearing my interests on His; I will plead daily for His coming to His kingdom upon earth, as He is pleading for my coming to

His kingdom in the heavens. My Lord paid all His vows for me. He vowed to give Himself an atonement for my sins, and make my salvation sure : how well He paid the vow ! There was no repenting of it, no drawing back when the payment was an agony ; and He did that “ in the presence of all the people,” for all heaven saw it and rejoiced. “ Now, I will pay my vows to Him, and I will do it in the presence of all the people,” for all shall see that it is no vain boast that I make when I say, “ O Lord, I am Thy servant for ever, for Thou hast loosed my bonds.”

If there is one thing more than another that must make me “ return to give glory to God,” it is the remembrance of what a loathsome, hopeless leper I was before He healed me. This “ purging from my old sins” I must never forget. It will keep me humble, but it will keep me praiseful too. If I am now a “ child of God,” I must never forget that once I was only a “ child of wrath, even as others.” If I am now a stone in the living temple, I must never forget “ the rock out of which I was hewn.” If I am now one of His vessels of honour, fashioned by Himself and *for* Himself, I must often think of “ the hole of the pit out of which I was dug,” when there was “ no difference ” between me and the rest of the clay. If I am now one of the Good Shepherd’s flock that shall “ never perish,” I must often recall that in the days of my foolish rebellion I “ wandered upon the

mountains, lost. All that I have ever been or done is worthy of sorrow and shame ; but what God has done for me is worthy of an endless song. My gracious Lord has long been lifting my burdens and bearing my loads ; and He promises to go on doing it to the last—" Even to your old age, I am He ; and to hoar hairs *I will carry you.*" He is worthy of His hire ; and all the hire He asks is the grateful praise of the soul that He is carrying.

XXVII

THE ALL-SUFFICING CHRIST

“ Will ye also go away ? ”—JOHN vi. 67.

DID the Master ever ask a more *pathetic* question than this? I recall, in connection with its undertone, how a good man once said, when thinking of the base treatment to which God is subjected by an unfeeling world, “ I feel such a pity for God.” Strange though the expression may be, I am inclined to echo it in thinking of the treatment my Master met with, when, after His long and loving outpouring of truth to the crowds that followed Him for loaves and fishes, they would not let it get a lodgement in their hearts at all. They had no fault to find with Him as a man, but His spiritual teaching was both too lofty for their low sympathies and too humbling for their proud, worldly hearts. The sovereignty of God, the need of having this Christ as the very food of their souls, the giving of His flesh for the life of the world—

these things offended them just as the same things are offending thousands still. As they listened they were first considerably interested, then greatly astonished, then absolutely enraged. Their pride rose up against doctrines that humbled them so much, and they pretended not to understand what really they understood well enough, but only heartily disliked. With an air of superiority they said, "Who ever heard such absurdities as these? This Man give us His flesh to eat! He is only befooling us with talk like that." And so they "went back, and walked no more with Him."

This defection of theirs was only natural. Even Christ Himself could not have been *surprised* at it. But how greatly it *saddened* the meek and patient Lord I can see in the very tone of His question about it to the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" He was not doubting them. His words might be more accurately rendered, "*You* do not wish to go away, do you?" And there I see the human heart of the Master longing for their outspoken sympathy at a very discouraging time.

Still, it was meant to test them; and right nobly did Peter answer for them all, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God." That was Peter at his very best. That quick, eager, unhesitating and undoubting reply came from his very heart. He was now a better disciple than he

had been. He had learned much by that wonderful experience of his on the water of the lake, in the storm of the day before. All the next day, too, as he listened to his Master's words, he had been lifted into higher regions of faith and discernment than he had ever reached till then ; and all his thoughts were at last focussed into one bright spot of loving trust and glad assurance, "Lord, there is none else for any of us to go to now. To leave Thee would be, for all of us, only blank despair."

There are times, in my life, too—perhaps to-day is one of them—when I seem to hear my Master putting His pathetic question also to me, and when I would need to be able to answer it for myself as Peter did. In an age like this, when doubt is everywhere, when remorseless hands are busy with attempts to pull down the most sacred and venerable beliefs, when the air is loaded with the mephitic vapour of sceptical reasonings, and I must breathe it whether I will or not ; when covert sneers as well as open assaults on the faith meet me in books and magazines ; when "culture" ridicules me as being behind the age, and these repeated shocks produce an unsettlement within, *loosening* the stones of my faith-temple, if they do not *overturn* them altogether, so that I seem to have no longer the old comfort and the old certainty and the old rest that were once so sweet, I may surely ask myself, as Peter did, "Supposing

that I give up my faith in Christ, as I am tempted to do, what will I put in its place? Whom will I put in *His* place? What *substitute* for Christ and the old gospel will I find? What *other* message of peace will I get that will meet my need and satisfy it so well? If Christ is henceforth to be nothing to me (for if I doubt Him in one thing I must doubt Him in all), what other friend is there to whom, in my sin and sorrow, I can as safely and as comfortingly cling?"

I may ask those, too, who would shake me out of my old faith in the Word of God, "What other light do you propose to put, or suggest may be put, in the place of this, that will bless the world one ten thousandth part as much? If you take away from me my faith in the reality of this Christ, if you will no longer let me think of Him as an atoning Saviour, and thus deprive me of all the brightness which has long illuminated my darkness here, and all the joyous hope that stretches away beyond this life altogether, how do you propose to compensate me for the loss? Will any other gospel, or other faith, or other hope do as much to cheer me, to ennoble me, to draw out all that is finest in devotion and loftiest in aim?" Let me ask all this, and think what the only possible answer to such questions must be; and then, though I may be shaken somewhat for a time by the assaults I have to face, I will be sure, ere long, to return joyfully to my old rest and say,

“ Lord, to whom but unto Thee can I go ? ” Even if the attacks sometimes made upon the old gospel seem so strong that I begin to fear that the foundations of God’s city have, at last, been greatly undermined, the power of these attacks to unsettle me will be gone when I confront them all with this one question, “ What other creed, what other gospel, what other hope will be so good for living men to live by, and dying men to die upon, as the old, long-tried, marvellous gospel of the crucified, risen, reigning Christ—that old gospel which still, in spite of a thousand attacks, is proving itself in the experience of tens of thousands of sinners, to be the only cure for a broken spirit, the only balm for a wounded conscience, the only pillow for a dying head—the gospel which is old as the very Fall, yet new as the new song of the New Jerusalem—the gospel that tells me what I can never tire of hearing on earth, and what I shall know in heaven when it comes, *that Christ is enough for me*, and *that Christ is all ?* ”

This also suggests to me the surest way of overcoming those doubts regarding my personal salvation which often trouble me so much: “ Is this Christ whom I have believed really trustworthy enough for me to risk my whole eternity on His bare word ? ” He often seems a dim and shadowy Saviour. I am not so sure, as I once was, that it is He that speaks, or that He speaks to me, when He gives the promises on which I lean.

The voice is like one that comes out of an infinite void—a dream-voice, and not a real one at all. Then, too, it sometimes seems as if I needed something more than His simple promise to assure my heart. I once thought that was enough, but I also thought that by this time I would have had far more comfort, and more holiness too, from believing it than I yet have reached; and since the past has thus disappointed me, I am not so sure as I used to be that the future will not disappoint me too.

In such a mood of mind I need not argue with my doubts, for argument will not end them. Let me rather just listen to the sorrowful question of my Master, “Will you also go away? Supposing that I fail you, to whom else will you turn?” That will show me my sin, my ingratitude, my folly, sooner than anything else. I cannot go back to my old life in the world, for I have proved by experience how unsatisfying that would be. I cannot shut out all thought and be indifferent; I know too much for that. I cannot take refuge in infidelity; my conscience is too awake for that. But, on the other hand, I cannot face the Holy Judge I have to meet without a righteousness infinitely better than my own is, or ever will be, without an advocate to clear me at the judgment bar, as this Christ offers to do. Well, if He will not be enough for me, who will? Who will be a sufficient substitute for this Christ if I give

Him up? That question will bring me back to rest.

Two things were turning-points in Peter's life : his Master's sorrowful *question* and his Master's sorrowful *look*. The question decided him to *remain* with Christ ; the look decided him to *return*. And lying behind his immediate feelings on both occasions was the great undoubted fact of his own personal experience of his Master's love and grace. When I am shaken by speculative difficulties I will take refuge in *my personal experience of my Lord*. I know what He has done for me and in me. I could not deny that if I wished. And if He ever sees me hesitating in my faith and says, " Will you also go away ? " I will exultingly reply, " No, not for a thousand worlds. ' Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all in Thee I find, ' ' my Lord and my God. ' "

XXVIII

PROFIT AND LOSS

“What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?”—LUKE ix. 25.

“What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”—MATTHEW xvi. 26.

THERE are at least two great surprises in these questions of the Master's. The first of them is that such questions should be addressed, not to utterly irreligious men, but to His own disciples. Do *disciples*, then, need to be warningly questioned thus? Are even they so liable to love the world in such a way that they may be in danger of losing their souls? But it was to *disciples* that He spoke those other words so closely akin to these, “Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be over-charged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.” The Lord sees

danger where I would see none. He understands my weakness better than I understand it myself.

Then next, it is a surprise to find that the great Lord was applying these questions *to Himself* ! They were called forth by Peter's rash outburst, after being told of the coming Cross, "that be far from Thee ; this shall not be unto Thee." Never, to his dying day, would Peter forget how his Master turned upon him, and said : "Get thee behind me, Satan ! thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that are of men." The rebuke was terrible. The revelation of Peter's hidden prompter was terrible too. But was there not in both, a back glance to His own temptation on the mountain-top, where Satan offered Him "the whole world" as the price of His soul ? "all this will I give thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." The same Satanic proposal came from Peter also. His Lord recognised its parentage in a moment, and felt, "Here is the old temptation over again" ; and so He said to Peter, "What would it profit Me if I should, in *your way*, gain the whole world, and lose My own highest and noblest life thereby ?" To save the lower life at the expense of the higher would have been no gain to *Him*, any more than to any of His followers, but only everlasting loss ; and therefore He says, "Be you all of the same mind with Me in this : *Whosoever* wills, at all costs, to save his life, shall lose it ; but whosoever

wills, for My sake, to lose his life, shall find it. For Me, and for you, self-sacrifice, obedience even unto death, is the way to honour and blessedness eternal; and the only way." How clearly, here, Christ recognises the higher life in man, which may either triumph over the lower life, or be killed by it. "Lose *yourself*," He says, "in the lower meaning of self, and you gain *yourself* in its highest meaning, its everlasting one. Seeking the life of the flesh, you lose the life of the spirit, —seeking to save what you *call* yourself, you lose what is *really* yourself, and are cast away."

These are deep sayings, and can be understood only by the sanctified feeling of a heart thoroughly renewed, and beating in perfect sympathy with the feelings and aims of the heavenly Lord. I must read them looking straight into the eyes of Jesus Christ Himself. They only reiterate the great saying—"If any man will come after Me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." That is the unbending, unchangeable, unrepealable statute-law of Christian discipleship, to the end of time. I cannot alter it or soften it down. I would not, though I could. For what it tells me is that *self-denial is only a closer imitation of Christ*. He calls it a "coming after" Him and "following" Him; and He Himself, therefore, was showing the example which all disciples are to copy. He was *always* carrying His cross; not once only in Jerusalem's streets, but

daily, hourly, all His life through; and what He asks of me is this, that I should carry my cross in the same spirit in which He carried His, planting my feet in His footprints.

It is very plain, then, that this Master is absolutely honest. He scorns the gaining of disciples by false pretences. He will not cheat me into following Him by rose-coloured pictures of His service, which experience will falsify soon. With absolute sincerity He warns me, from the first, that it will not be easy for me to go after Him, that it will cost me much. But then, He asks me to do nothing that He has not done Himself. It is a great test this—"let him deny himself." I must deny my own *self-estimate*, else I will think myself too good to suffer for Christ. I must deny my own *wisdom*, else I will be too prudent to suffer for Christ. I must deny my own *ease*, else I will be too slothful to suffer for Christ. I must deny my own *interests*, else I will be too worldly to suffer for Christ. I must deny my own *fears*, else I will be too cowardly to suffer for Christ. It is a great test; and I am to do this "daily"! How can I follow a Master who asks so much as that? To take up the cross once for all would be easy compared with the taking it up every day afresh. And yet, if the *dailiness* of the self-sacrifice seems, at first, to intensify the pain of it,—looked at in another light, it greatly diminishes the weight. It is *only* the daily cross, to-day's cross, that I am

asked to bear. My Master does not ask me to set out by bearing all the crosses of the next twenty years, or even of the next week. Indeed I have not, to-day, to carry even the cross of to-morrow ; and for my "daily cross" there will be given me "daily bread" to strengthen me. That *dailiness* of the sacrifice which seems to make it harder is the very thing that makes it easier. He is a good Master after all.

I see, however, that Christ has another question still, which is not merely a repetition of the previous ones, rather a farther question springing out of them. He begins by asking what I would be profited if, after labouring to gain all that the world can give of pleasure, comfort, honour, power, and sinking my higher life in the search for that, the world passes away from me, or I from it, leaving me only the bitter sense of an everlasting loss. But *next*, He asks me another question ; whether, on discovering this beyond the grave, I will be able to give God anything *in exchange* for my soul, that it may be delivered from the woe into which my self-loving life has brought it, *any ransom-price* for my forfeited "life" ; and my only answer to that second question must be, that in such a case I could have nothing of sufficient value to offer, nothing that He could possibly accept. The loss I suffer has this tremendous characteristic, *it cannot be retrieved*.

In making plans for life, seeking to accomplish

some ambitious schemes that are to gratify my love of the world, I must face the solemn possibility that in gaining these I may lose *myself*, lose all that is noblest in me, till my soul has become shrivelled, withered, dead. But I am not to limit the range of my self-denial to the *greater* things of life. I must let it come down to *every* form of the self-life, not merely to love of wealth or power or fame, but to much smaller things than these. The great occasions that call for very great sacrifices of self are comparatively rare; but there are small occasions occurring every day that demand it, where the sacrifice is quite as difficult. It may need much self-denial for a rich man to lay his money at Christ's feet, or for one who is in the fair way of becoming rich to relinquish the prospect, if the way in which the wealth is to come is one that conscience condemns; but it will often need quite as much self-denial to do so small a thing as to suppress a jest lest it should pain some one that hears it, or keep back some clever witticism lest it should bring sacred things into contempt. It may need great self-denial for one to leave house and kindred, and spend all life as a herald of the Cross among savage tribes; but it may be quite as real a self-sacrifice to remain at home and stand out there, boldly protesting, by word and act, against the sins of the day, at the risk of making himself unpopular, and even of losing some friendships that

he fain would keep. In every home, in the smallest things, there is large room for self-denial, and a loud call for it too; and say what we may about the self-denial needed in all true Christian discipleship, no life is, after all, so *blessed* as that which is fullest of devotion to the will of God. Say what we will about earthly joys, no life, after all, is so *poor* a thing as that which is devoted to these alone. It has "*disappointment*" written upon it while it lasts, and "FAILURE" written on it in largest capitals when all is done.

Let me bear in mind that if "*self-preservation is the first law of nature,*" *self-sacrifice is the first law of grace.* In the school of Christ, self-denial is the first thing taught; and it is also the last thing thoroughly learnt. "Teach me, O God, to do *Thy will.*"

XXIX

A SERPENT IN PARADISE

“Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?”—
JOHN vi. 70.

It was in a noble burst of love and loyalty that Peter replied to his Master's question, “Will ye also go away”? by saying for himself and all the rest, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” His charity included all the rest of the little band. He thought every one of them must feel as he did himself. But the Lord saw deeper than Peter did, and said, “You cannot, all of you, echo these words of faith; there is one of you who even now *has* thoughts of going away; one who, professedly My disciple, is a devil at heart.”

The apostasy of Judas was, even then, far on its way to the final betrayal, yet he did not “go away” at once. He sheltered himself, for the time, under

Peter's confession, and remained with the Master, apparently as true as any of the rest. Better would it have been for him if he *had* gone away ! It would have been more honest ; and there might have been the hope that, like the prodigal son, he would ere long have returned, humble and penitent, to the Master's side. But hypocrisy, pride, and covetousness were a threefold cord that held him fast ; and under the power of it he kept among the disciples still. Does this show that even false-hearted men can resist temptation ? Not so. It only shows that a sufficiently powerful temptation had not yet come. Some men are not to be bought so cheaply as others : but all radically insincere men *have their price* ; and those who keep up longest the profession of being true fall more tragically than others, when they do give way.

This was the Master's *first* intimation to the disciples, that they had a traitor in their midst ; and very startling to them must have been His words, " One of you is a devil." His long discourse had been gradually winnowing the miscellaneous crowd that followed Him, till only twelve men were left. Now, He puts these twelve under His winnowing fan ; and lo ! one of them is a devil !

A very solemn thought presses on me here. The same sifting by the Word and by Providence is still going on ; what if it should be with the same

result? What if the Lord, who is "searching Jerusalem with candles," whose "eyes are as a flame of fire," as He looks down upon His great professing Church, gladdened by the faith of some, saddened by the hypocrisy of others, should find, not one traitor in every ten thousand—that would be sad enough—but one traitor in every twelve? Let my question about this be, not "Lord, who is it"? but "Lord, is it I"? for I would need to look well to the reality of my own discipleship if one like Judas could fall so terribly—a man who had long been in the very closest companionship with Christ, who had known Him as few did, who had been commissioned as an apostle, and had been endowed, like the rest, with gifts of healing and of miracle; but a man who deceived the whole of them, and, worse than that, deceived *himself*.

Most depraved men have some things about them that relieve the blackness of their souls, some "good points" that even great wickedness in other directions does not quite obliterate. But I search in vain for any of these in Judas. I find in him no trace of generous impulses, or tender sympathies, or gentle emotions; nothing but a cold, sordid, calculating selfishness, without anything to relieve its hardness. Few men have ever perhaps been more intensely bad; and yet he had not been always so. In the light of his later years it is strangely affecting to think of him as a little child over whose infant face a mother's eyes had often

bent in love, and whose responsive smiles had often gladdened that mother's heart; and then, as a bright and clever boy, giving promise of a manhood that would be beautiful and good. A great *appearance* of good must have been in him when the Lord chose him as one of the Twelve; for not one of the other eleven so much as suspected him of wrong, till very near the end. Whatever produced it, the deterioration of his character *outwardly* must have been rapid; though *inwardly* it had been only *gradual and slow*. The seeds of his future sin were long lying dormant in his soul; but they only waited the favourable circumstances of temptation and opportunity to spring to life and bear their noxious fruit. His essentially worldly heart had, at first, pleased itself with the hope of wealth and power in the kingdom which the Master spoke of setting up. But as the months went on, he saw that his glowing anticipations would not be realised. This Christ was preparing for *death*, and not for a throne; and the world-loving heart of Judas was first disappointed, and then enraged, at the spirituality of his Master's aims; till in the heat of his passion he formed the deliberate purpose of sacrificing that Master to his revenge. Even when the anger cooled, the resolve remained, just as the lava that is poured red-hot from the volcano hardens into rock; and in that mood of mind he was capable of anything. It only needed the farther thought that, since Christ would

fall into the hands of His enemies in any case, he might as well profit by what was unavoidable,—to make him ready to sell him for anything He could get. It is easy to trace the process. Wounded self-love, passing into disappointment, went on to positive anger, and ended in malicious revenge. No wonder that Jesus said of him, “One of you is a *devil*”; for both the feelings and the acts of Judas were absolutely Satanic at the last.

And yet he was not an absolutely abnormal monster of iniquity. His sin was exceptional sin, only because the circumstances were exceptional circumstances. Thousands of professed disciples in the Church to-day, are already sinning in heart as Judas did, and ready to put the heart-disloyalty into act, if it should seem to be for their worldly interest to do so. I am not judging uncharitably; for I cannot shut my eyes. When I see conscience and faith sacrificed for some lucrative position; when I see men trading upon their loud profession of the Christian name, getting themselves thereby implicitly trusted in the administration of other men’s means, and gambling with these means for personal profit, bringing ruin on thousands who thought them incapable of wrong: or when I see some who began their disciple-life seemingly earnest, spiritually-minded, prayerful and true, gradually become so ensnared by love of the world as to lose not only all that earnestness in religion, but religion itself, till they are as hard and dead as

ever Judas was, I think, with a shudder at the heart, that this may be the case with many whose inward hypocrisy not one eye detects but the eye of Christ; I think, with alarm, how easy it is to open the door for Satan to "enter in," till he has made a very devil of the heart that thus "gives him place"; and I ask myself again, "Is it I?" For, though I may not—if I am really the Lord's I cannot—fall away as Judas did, I may yet fall so low as greatly to dishonour my Master, before He lifts me up and "restores my soul." I may thank God that being "*in Christ*," and not merely *with Him*, I cannot perish; that He will keep me from a final apostasy, seeing that I am "born of God," as Judas was not; that I love Christ, as Judas never loved; that I can say, "I know whom I have believed," as Judas never could; and yet, I may be left to fall, by my own sin, so low as to make me almost indistinguishable from a castaway. If it is impossible to say how far heavenwards a mere pretender can soar, it is equally impossible to say how far hellwards a truly regenerated man may sink. I may fall back so terribly from my "first love" as to make it doubtful to myself, and to every one else, if I ever had it. Though still a child, I may become such a fallen child, as to make it impossible to prove my sonship to any. "Say not," says an old writer, "that thou hast royal blood in thy veins, and art born of God, unless thou canst prove thy pedigree by holiness of life."

I may not be "a devil," as Judas was; into *his* awful sin I may never fall; and yet my Master's solemn question may well make me examine myself, and consider how easy a thing self-deception is. Just because I know that I have "received a kingdom which cannot be moved," I am to serve God acceptably, with reverence *and godly fear*." Just because a sure "promise has been given me of entering into His rest," I am to "*fear* lest I should come short of it." Blessed is the man that feareth alway"—"Thinking I stand, I must take heed lest I fall."

XXX

COURAGEOUS CALM

“Are there not twelve hours in the day?”—JOHN xi. 9.

THE Lord is revealing to me, in this simple way, the deep secret of His own perfect peace. The disciples thought Him running into danger without due consideration, and would have kept Him back from it: “Master, the Jews sought of late to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again?” But He calmly put the idea of danger aside, when it was a question simply of fulfilling the work given Him to do. “My life,” He said, “is, every moment, in My Father’s hands; it will be long or short just as My Father wills; I can go fearlessly wherever He calls Me to go. With possible dangers in My path I have nothing to do. They will not shorten, by one hour, the time given Me for finishing His work. My only danger would lie in refusing that work through fear. To order My own life would be, even for Me, to plunge Myself into darkness at once;

but so long as I am doing My Father's will, it is fullest daylight with Me; and I run no risk." There spoke the faithful servant, and the trustful Son. "No hand can touch Me till My work is done."

Once before He had looked at that work from another side, the *shortness* of the time for doing it in. "I must work the work of Him that sent Me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." The swift passing of time and opportunity was, even for Him, a call to be up and doing; and His eagerness to complete His work grew in intensity the nearer the end came. It could be seen in His very *looks*. The disciples, as they watched Him, were awe-struck by His preoccupied expression, arising from the tension of His spirit. "They were *amazed*, and as they followed Him they were *afraid*," as if they said, "What can this intense eagerness to go forward portend?" It could be detected also in His *words*, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how is My soul straitened till it be accomplished!" "Straitened," as if kept in by bonds of time and space which He willingly would break; almost chafing at the restrictions which He fain would overleap.

But here, He puts the matter in another way. "My work is not yet done, and My Father will take care of Me until it is." In these two sayings lies Christ's deep secret for faithful service; a blending of intensest earnestness and

calmest trust. "I must not, by indolence or self-indulgence, *lose* one moment of the short time granted Me for doing My Father's will—and I must not, by cowardly fear, try to *add* one moment to My allotted time." Good Richard Baxter puts the matter well:—

"Lord, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live;
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And that Thy grace must give.

If life be long, I will be glad,
That I may long obey:
If life be short, should I be sad,
To soar to endless day?"

The more closely I read the Gospel story I am sure to be the more struck with the significant fact that Jesus never adopted any suggestion made to Him by others, not even by His best disciples. Even they were always interfering with Him, and seeking, as it were, to keep Him right! When wearing Himself out with labours of healing mercy prolonged into the night, His friends went out and sought to lay hands on Him, to make Him cease. "He is beside Himself" they said. When Mary, at the marriage-feast of Cana, said to Him, "They have no wine," she evidently felt she was making a kind suggestion, that He should supply the lack. He only answered, "My time is not yet come." Peter, hearing Him speak of His coming death, began to rebuke Him, saying, "This shall not be

unto Thee." James and John wanted Him to let them avenge the slight the Samaritan villagers had put upon Him. "Our Master," they said, "is not standing upon His dignity enough!" "Depart hence and go into Judea," said His brethren, "that Thy disciples also may see the works that Thou doest." They thought He was hiding His light! "Send the multitudes away to buy bread" said the disciples on the hill-side over the lake. They would let Him see how considerate *they* were, if He was not! When some "brought young infants to Him that He might touch them and pray," the disciples rebuked the intruders, and expected His thanks! But He only said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not." When the woman of Tyre besought eagerly His mercy on her daughter vexed with a devil, again the disciples interposed, "Send her away, for she crieth after us"; it was really more than He or they should submit to, to be troubled thus! So here, too, they wanted to save Him from being too rashly careless of His life! It was all well meant, but in a blundering sort of way; as if they could guard His health, His honour, His life better than Himself. Every suggestion He calmly put aside. *He took suggestions only from His Father in heaven.* The will of the Father was His sole guide at every moment of the day; and therefore, though there never was a life more crowded with ceaseless activity than His, there never was a life more

calm. He seems absolutely free from haste and excitement on the one hand, and from worry and distraction on the other. Perpetual interruptions by cavillers never discomposed Him. Carping objections never irritated Him. Popular enthusiasm never carried Him away. Popular clamour never disturbed Him. The thought of possible danger lying in front never dismayed Him. He lived in absolute trust, because He lived in absolute obedience; and so He had absolute peace. Even in the very bitterest hour of darkness He could say to His disciples "*My peace* I give unto you"—a peace that came from such an absolute oneness of will with the Father about everything, that nothing could shake it, even for an hour.

I am sure many disciples, I myself among them, need to remember the Master's question, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" Some forget it through *laziness*; and some through *fear*; and some through *fussiness*. Some disciples, too indolent and self-indulgent, act as if every day had twenty hours instead of twelve. They are never in dead earnest about their Master's work. They take things very easily. They are almost asleep; at least they are only half awake. They never seem to feel the need of being busy in the work given them to do. "God works slowly," they say, and in that way they excuse their indolence! Other disciples, of a nervous temperament, are always *fussy* in their work for God. They seem to

think there are only six hours in the day, not twelve. They are all on fire, and seem to have discovered the secret of perpetual motion. They are never calm enough to cool, for they are never at rest. They do not think enough of the quiet mountain-tops where the Master found refreshment to His soul, after labour all the day. They seem never to realise that the *pauses of life* have their high uses, of an invigorating kind. And so their fussy energy soon expends itself, and the cold fit of depression succeeds the fever-heat of excitement in which they have been living too long. A ceaseless rush of outward activities makes it impossible for them to retreat often enough to the quiet chamber of meditation and prayer, and so their strength soon decays. "It is the *pace* that kills."

But other disciples still may forget their Master's question about the twelve hours of the day, through *fear*. The whisper of His spirit comes to them, urging to some particular thing to be done as work for God, and instantly they see a thousand difficulties in the way—the sneers of the world, the coldness of friends, the risk of losing the good opinion of some whose good opinion they value more than the smile of their Lord, the probability that they will suffer in their earthly interests, through their dependence, in business, on the goodwill of an ungodly master. These, and many such things, rise up like lions in the way. They have an uncomfortable vision of much suffering in store for

them : " Jews ready to stone them," if they go on ; and fear unnerves them for the task.

The picture *all* these different sorts of disciples need to keep looking at is the picture presented here—the *unresting, unhasting, unfearing* Christ. In these three things lay the deep secret of His wonderful life. He was *unresting* in His work because He felt He must *finish* the work the Father had given Him to do. He was *unhasting* in the work because, waiting *continually* upon the Father's will, He never sought to do more than "the work of each day, in its day." And He was *unfearing* because He knew His life was in the Father's hands. One of our hymns speaks of "*courage rising with danger.*" To Christ, and to any Christ-following soul, *there is never any danger at all.* "If I live, Christ is with me ; if I die, I am with Him."

XXXI

A SPECIALISING FAITH

“Believest thou *this* ?”—JOHN xi. 26.

MY Lord and Master comes very closely home to me with His questions. He will not let me content myself with generalities ; He goes into minute details. He is not satisfied with my *comprehension* of the truth ; He asks, “*Believest thou this ?*” He will not let me shelter myself from His home-thrusts by adherence to *the Church’s* creed ; He wants to know my own creed—“*Believest thou this ?*” and He will not be content with my believing mere *elementary* truth. He leads me up to the highest truth, and asks “*Believest thou this ?*”

In His whole conversation with Martha of Bethany the Lord was leading *her*—and in this story of it He is leading *me*—to a higher conception of Himself. She had already a high conception of His love, for she felt that just to tell Him of her need, without asking anything, would bring

Him to her side. She had a high conception of His power, for she knew that He, if only there, could easily rebuke that sickness, and bring back her brother to health. She had also a high conception of His peculiar intimacy with God, for she said that she knew God would deny Him nothing He chose to ask. But she needed a higher conception of Him still, as having the Eternal Life in Himself so that He could give it out wherever He pleased; nay, as being the Eternal Life; and therefore He said to her, "*I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Believest thou this?*"

I see, then, that Martha's sorrow was so overwhelming, just because she did not know enough of her Master. Had she but known Him in the fulness of His glorious power, her sorrow would have been at an end; and so I see that the reason I so often remain uncomforted in the great sorrows that fall on me is this, that I do not know my Lord as I ought to do. I believe in Him a little, but I do not believe *enough*. I trust Him greatly, but I do not trust Him *absolutely*. I realise His love, but I very dimly realise the infinite power that is behind the love; and therefore when He wishes to bring to me the highest of His consolations, He utters to me now one and now another of His largest and grandest promises, and says, "Believest thou *this?*"

There are great regions of consolation in my Master's words which I have hardly explored as yet, and great treasures waiting for me in that unvisited land, of the very existence of which I am still completely ignorant. His *saving* power I know, but His *strengthening* power I do not know. The *vital* truths of His gospel I know, but the *exhilarating and uplifting* truths I take hold of very feebly at the best. I feed upon the bread of life, but the luscious fruits in "my beloved's garden" I hardly ever taste. So I am weak where I ought to be strong, and sorrowful where I might be full of joy.

Martha's two mistakes are just my own mistakes every day. First, she was looking far into the *future*; and Jesus comforted her by speaking of the *present*. I, too, am often heavy-hearted because I am looking only for a future salvation, not realising it as a thing that belongs to me here and now. I have a quiet hope of being welcomed at the last, but no joyous assurance of my full "acceptance in the Beloved," even now. If I were only safely past all temptation, and happily done with my own unsteadfastness, I would feel absolutely secure; but I cannot feel any security just yet. My Lord pities me for this. He sees that I do not understand Him yet; and so He says to me, "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but *is passed* from death to life. Believest

thou *this* ? ” “ My sheep shall never perish, none is able to pluck them out of My hands. Believest thou *this* ? ” My doubts on this point surely dishonour my Saviour. If I have returned home as a repentant prodigal, and have been received by a Father's close embrace, why should I talk as if I were not sure I have been really forgiven ? Why should I hang my head in my Father's presence instead of looking up into His face through my tears of shame and joy ? Why should I go away doubtfully, only wishing it were true, when my Saviour says to me, “ Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins *are* forgiven thee ” ? Why should I answer Him, “ I know that they shall be forgiven me in the Resurrection at the last day,” when He is telling me that “ the Son of man hath power *on earth* to forgive sins,” and asking me once again, “ Believest thou *this* ? ”

I see that a second mistake of Martha's was that she was looking too far *afield* as well as too far *ahead*, thinking of what concerned the indiscriminate mass of men, the world's millions everywhere, instead of looking at what was close at hand and concerned herself. Looking only at the general resurrection of *all* the dead, which is in itself by no means a specially consoling truth, she missed the very meaning of her Master's words, “ Thy brother shall rise again.”

Perhaps it is in this very way that I, too, miss the special comfort of many of my Lord's words to

me. I read His great promises in so poor and narrow a way that they do not unfold to me their full consoling power. The Christ who is so wonderfully near to me I remove to a distance, and so allow myself only a few drops of His consolation now and then, while He would willingly give me the comfort in a stream flowing at my very feet. I believe that He was a propitiation for the sins of *the world*, but do I make that general truth a specific and personal one, and believe that, therefore, He was a propitiation for *me*? To say that it is my *privilege* to possess complete gospel-peace is not to say enough. It is my *duty* to possess it. The will of the Lord is that "my joy should be full." I not only *may*, but, more than that, I *ought* to be "filled with all joy and peace in believing." I dishonour my Saviour if I put aside His hand and refuse to take the blessings He offers me, because I think them too great for Him to give, or for me to receive.

There must be thousands of disciples in all the churches, of whom it can only be said that they are just alive. Their pulse is feeble. Their strength is small. Their songs have no joyous ring. There is none of the brightness of God's fair sunshine in their souls. That poor experience is certainly better than nothing; just as a sick man is better than one dead. But when the great Christ restores a man, it is not *from death to sickness*, but *from death to all the fulness of strong*

and happy life. I would like oftener to hear my Master say to me, "Friend, go up higher," higher in faith, higher in experience, higher in joy, and higher in praise. Tears for sin are good; but praise for the pardon of sin is better. It is good to fall at His feet, daring no more than to touch His garment's hem; but it is better to go higher and lean upon His arm; and better still to sit down with Him even now in heavenly places, without any misgiving as to my right, through His grace, to be there. It is good to take the lowest place and be as the dogs that gather the falling crumbs; but better far to sit at my Father's table, as in my Father's house, and eat the children's bread. It is to this that I am called. My Master tells me that all is meant for me, and asks "Believest thou *this*?"

So, too, with all the trials and worries of my daily life. His way of comforting me under these is just the same, bringing a wide and general truth so closely home to my heart that I feel it to have a very special and personal application. When I say that I believe that on the whole, in a general sort of way, "all things work together" for my good, He asks, "But do you believe *that* of every smallest item in the great sum?" Let me consider this. Can I go over all my troubles, the smallest and the greatest alike, and say of each, "*this* is working for good to me"? Do I believe that that heavy loss I had a few years ago, that accident I

met with last year, that bereavement I suffered six months ago, that trial I had last week, that anxiety that troubles me to-day, that keen vexation I met with yesterday, that bitter disappointment I had the day before, has really, each in its own way, and each in turn, been working for my good? I believe that the love of God arranges and overshadows my life as a whole; but how about that love resting equally on each day and hour and moment of that one life? Am I believing *this*? I will be very still and listen as my God says to me, "I will *never* leave thee nor forsake thee; Believest thou this?" "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He *shall* bring it to pass; Believest thou this?" Help me, O Master, to say "Amen. Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief."

XXXII

TENDERNESS

“He groaned in the spirit and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him?”—JOHN xi. 33, 34.

THE peculiar interest of this question lies in the fact that in it, for the first time, Jesus gave the sorrowing sisters a proof that He was really feeling with them in their deep grief. Up to this point He had been speaking down to them from His own calm height; speaking lovingly, but still as One above them. Now He puts Himself on their own level, sharing their sorrows, mingling His own tears with theirs.

I see here how intensely human Jesus was, although divine. He spoke to them with the tears of sympathy welling up into His eyes—tears that, the next moment, fell silently, but copiously, over all His face; and it is a most significant fact that this Gospel of John, which, more than the other three, reveals the true *Deity* of the Lord, is

that one which, more than the others, reveals His perfect *humanity* as well.

From anything He yet had said to the sorrowing ones, it could not have been inferred that He had personally felt deeply the death of Lazarus. He seemed not to look upon their sorrow as a real sorrow that needed sympathy; and though this can be explained by His knowledge that the death was soon to be turned into glorious life, still there is little trace of any very deep feeling with the natural grief of the sisters, who, of course, knew nothing of that. But the deep feeling had been there all the time, and it was Mary's wild outburst of sobs and tears that prompted Him at last to show what had been hidden under His exterior calm. These tears of hers brought home to him, as one might say, with new vividness, the fearfulness of the curse that sin had brought upon the world, and that was making such havoc in it. He had known that all along, and seen it too in the case of others. But this was the first time that it came closely home to His personal affections, as witnessed in the small circle of His best-loved friends; and it so "troubled Him" that He "shuddered with indignation" at the great foe who had been the cause of it all. He saw here the work of sin in all its length and breadth, and from this His thoughts would go out to all the sin-cursed world. He would see, as in a swift vision, the same scene repeated daily, hourly, over all the

earth ; would see, in one flash, all earth's desolated homes, all its weeping mourners, all its gloomy graves, and all its falling tears—tears, most of them, which no resurrection would dry up, no comforter's hand would wipe away. He would see that even Lazarus would need to die again, and the same tears fall over him once more. He would see, too, that even this great miracle of love He was soon to work would only prompt His foes to deeper sin, in plotting His destruction afresh. He would see that some of the very bystanders who were to witness His miracle would turn against Him ; that He would need to pay with His own life for this giving back of life to the dead. What wonder if, having this swift vision of the fearful work of sin, He shuddered at it, and was indignant at it, as being not only the destroyer of holiness, but the destroyer of joy ; and then, in haste to put an end to the weeping of those He loved so well, said, "Where have ye laid him? Let me end your sorrow now at once."

It is good for me to have "such a High Priest" as this, who is "touched with a feeling of my grief," and can enter into my sorrows as if they were His own. Strange, perhaps, that He should so feel in the presence of a death that, in ten minutes more, was to be turned into happy life ! But all my sorrows are, in His sight, "but for a moment," and yet He weeps along with me when I am in the midst of them. He mingles His own

holy tears with those of mine, which, next moment, He wipes away. It is good for me to see that my Lord does not grudge me the tears I shed over the grave where my loved one lies. It is forbidden me to *murmur*; but it is *not* forbidden me to *mourn*. I am only not to mourn "as those that have no hope." My tears may be sanctifying tears, and it helps me much when I see that my Lord Himself was not ashamed to weep. Divine enough to dry the tears of others, He was yet human enough to shed tears Himself.

For I see in my Master more than simply a *human* Christ—I see an *emotional* Christ; and with this picture of Him the world cannot dispense. There is a strange fascination for some minds in that superiority to all emotion which has for ages been canonized in the Romish Church as the very height of saintliness; that crucifixion of all natural feeling, which is thought to be essential to the soul's dwelling amid heavenly raptures and ecstatic devotions. Her wonderful pictures of ascetic and half-angelic saints, cut off completely from all the feelings of common men and women, and living in a higher perfection of the spiritual nature than can be reached amid the ordinary joys and sorrows of life, have always been the most powerful attraction for sentimental minds to the Church of Rome. But assuredly the spiritual taste must be sadly corrupted if it is imagined that any such icy separation from human sympathies is a

nobler style of living than was shown by Him who mingled freely in the homes of the people, entering into their joys, sharing their griefs, eating at their feasts, taking their little children into His arms, weeping at their graves. When will even Christians cease from thinking themselves wiser than their Master was?

But I learn from Him yet more. His emotionalness of love suggests to me that the current religion of the day is greatly deficient in the elements of *pathos* and spiritual *tenderness*. It concerns itself with the maxims of Jesus rather than His tears. The Christ of the age is a teaching and a working Christ rather than a weeping one.

The characteristics of discipleship chiefly insisted upon are strength of principle and activity of zeal; but spiritual emotion is at a discount. It is called weak sentiment. It is a thing most men rather despise. The earlier Church had far more of this tenderness than we, and it worshipped tenderness more. The old galleries are full of pictures of Christ, but they show Him chiefly as crowned with thorns, as weeping in the garden, as laid in the tomb. Our own forefathers had more of it too. The religious life of even fifty years ago was more suffused with tenderness than it is to-day. There was emotion in the preaching that made weeping in the pew. Communion tables were often wet with tears. It would certainly not be good to get back into the old gloom so often

associated with the thought of the suffering Christ ; but it will be an unhappy day for the Church when the weeping, agonising, dying Christ shall cease to be impressive, and nothing be left us but Christ as a divine philosopher. For with the loss of spiritual tenderness there comes a loss of sensitiveness and delicacy in spiritual perception. We tend to become, not hardened exactly, but *stiffened* in our sympathies, and thus the *beautifying* graces of the Christian life are neglected for those that are merely *strong*. A very lethargic age needs most the stimulus of Christ's consuming zeal ; but a busy, practical age like ours needs much the corrective of Christ's silent tears. There are thousands of Christian men who pride themselves upon their freedom from emotion ; but they would be a thousand times better Christians if they had a good deal more of it. For we are uplifted by our emotions even more than by the intellect. Some of the most sanctifying experiences lie in the region of the feelings ; but hard prosaic work too often clips the wings, and quite unfits us for seeing Abraham's mystical city while we journey, or Jacob's angels when we sleep.

It is a most precious glimpse into the heart of my Lord that is given me in the words that tell how, immediately after asking "Where have ye laid him?" "*Jesus wept.*" The translators did well to make a separate verse of that, and if that short verse had not been in the Gospel story how

large a part of the consolation of my Master's humanity would have been lost! Let me thank God for my Redeemer's tears. The "Man of sorrows" is the man for sorrowers. The weeping Saviour makes me glad. My tears are often telescopes to let me look more clearly into the far-off land, where tears shall never come. It comforts me to see that He thinks tenderly even of the resting-place of my dead. If He asks me, "Where have you laid your loved one?" I will answer, "*Come* and see," for I will not go alone, even to weep there. I will take my Lord along with me, and I will listen to Him as there He tells me of the glorious life that is only a little way beyond. If my Lord goes with me to the grave I can look at it calmly, even through still falling tears, as *His* holy ground, where He is keeping one of His loved ones safe till the breaking of the day.

XXXIII

THROUGH FAITH TO SIGHT

“Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God.”—JOHN xi. 40.

THIS was the Lord's tender way of comforting a very sad-hearted disciple, from whom, after weary waiting and disappointment, hope seemed to have fled for ever. Four days before, He had said “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby”; and these words, spoken first beyond Jordan, He had sent as a message of hope, while He Himself still lingered far away. No doubt, on coming to Bethany, He had repeated them Himself to her. But the dead body, with corruption already begun, seemed to give them the lie, and as she looked at the grave, her faith staggered under the blow. Jesus did not argue with her; He just calmly put all her objections aside. *She* was looking at the difficulties in the way. *He* never so much as

alluded to difficulties. He simply took her in *behind* the difficulties, and bade her think of His Almighty Power, and trust Him to the last. "Said I not unto thee? Well, I say the same thing still."

I read these words with deepest joy, not because of what they tell me about Martha, but because of what they tell me of her Master and mine. I see the *absolute trustworthiness* of my Christ. I see His *claim* to be trusted; but I see more. I see His *right* to be trusted to the uttermost; and I see that He is infinitely *worthy* of that trust. Had Martha only *known* her Lord sufficiently, no doubt would have troubled her poor heart for a moment. Before I really know Christ, it is difficult for me to trust Him utterly; but, once known, it is impossible *not* to trust Him. This is a secret that the great Apostle Paul had well learned, when he said "I know *whom* I have believed." He did not say "I know *that I have trusted Him*"; he said "I know *Him* on whom my trust reposes; I know *His character to be the infinitely trustworthy one*"; and this was a thing that could never need reconsideration. It was a settled matter. "I know whom I *have* believed"; not, "I know one whom I *may* trust, as soon as necessity arises"; nor, "I know one whom I *will* trust when things come to the worst"; nor, "I know one whom I *must* trust as my last resource, when all others fail"; but, "I know Him to whom I have already surrendered my trust, whom I have trusted once for all, and who

will keep me safe for ever. I trust Him *because I know Him*. I know Him to be one who will never go back upon His word." Was it not just to this that Jesus sought to bring the weeping Martha? "*Said I not* unto thee? What I have once said, I will never unsay." It seems to me that, for all the high purposes of faith, it is easier for me to know Christ than to know any one else, or even to know myself, and that for this simple reason, that neither I nor other men are ever two days alike, but *He* changes not. When I see Christ at all I see what He will always be. Looking at myself and men is like looking at the ever-changeful sea. Looking at Christ is like looking at a great mountain-peak, the same at all seasons, the same by night as by day. Mists may cover it for a time, but when they lift, it stands out absolutely as it was before. Knowing Him thus, I *must* trust Him evermore.

"*Said I not* unto thee?" was a rebuke as well as an encouragement. It was like what He said to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" What my Master wants from me above all things else is a simple faith in what He has already said to me. There is nothing He takes such loving pains to teach me, but nothing I am so slow to learn, as this absolute and unquestioning faith in Himself: and to all my difficulties, He has but one reply "*Believe, and thou shalt see.*" If He delays to fulfil some of

His words, and I begin to think He cannot possibly fulfil them now, I will remember that the blessing is delayed, only that it may be a more enriching blessing when it comes. I think often of my Lord's *anticipating* love, the love that foresees my need, and provides beforehand for it; but I will think, also, of His *tarrying* love, the love that keeps me long in the darkness, and seems to disregard my cry. I know that if He lays some heavy trial on me, it is *because He loves me*; for the more precious the jewel, the more cutting it gets from the lapidary's hands. I will believe that if He *continues* the trial, it is still *because He loves me*; that if He seems only to heap fresh fuel upon an already scorching fire, it is *because He loves me*; that if, when I call Him to my Bethany, He lingers among the hills of Gilead, it is *because He loves me*; and I will believe that at last He will explain it all, "it was for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." At the right moment for me, as well as for Him, He will reveal that glory, and turn my sorrow into joy; for—

"His wisdom is sublime,
His heart is ever kind;
God never is before His time,
And never is behind."

Martha soon saw the glory of God of which her Master spoke. She saw it in the Master Himself, who proved Himself to be the Lord

of Life ; and she saw it also in the glorious results that followed her brother's restoration from the grave : " Many who came and saw the things which Jesus did, believed on Him " ; " by reason of Lazarus, many of the people believed on Jesus." When I am mourning over a loved one's tomb, not seeing what possible good can come out of my heart-breaking bereavement, let me believe that God may have mercy to others in view, when He sends this sorrow upon me ; that this may be the beginning of an awakening to true and blessed life in some whom all my appeals have hitherto failed to touch. Many a death-bed has been the birthplace of weeping souls, and over tears below, the angels of heaven have rejoiced, because the lost have been found.

Let me learn, therefore, from my Master's question, " Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest *believe* thou shouldest see ? " and from His echo of them in His latest benediction, " Blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed," that my heart may be most at rest when I simply believe what my Master says, and *because He says it*. My difficulties, whether speculative or practical, will not be *solved* by this, they will simply *pass out of view*. I will get in behind them, and then find that they need never have disturbed me. They will be like the towering battlements of a city where I fain would find my home. At first, I think they can never

be passed unless I assault them by force, and all my efforts to do that fail. But at length I discover that no assault is required, for the city gate opens to a gentle knock; and when once within, I can look upon the great walls from the other side, and see that the fortifications which so alarmed me are now my defence.

Let me learn, also, to deal with my own discouragements as Jesus dealt with Martha's, and put the things which I *believe* over against the things I *see*, and so find rest. If any simple-minded Christian were asked the secret of his peace, he would say, "I just believe what my God tells me, and I am at rest. What I see or feel does not disquiet me, because I set over against it, what, on His authority, I believe. I see enough of sin in me every day to make me cry, 'chief of sinners'; but I believe so fully in the forgiveness of sins, that I know 'to me there is no condemnation.' I see, in my outward lot, a thousand things that trouble me; but I believe, notwithstanding, that 'all things work together' for my good. I see sin covering the earth, and Satan appearing to triumph everywhere; but I believe his destruction is as sure to come, as it is that Jehovah reigns. I see the sick bed, and the coffin, and the grave of some dearly loved one whose going from me has left me desolate; but though I see death, I believe in Life; though I see the tomb, I believe in resurrection from the tomb; though I see and feel the sundering

of sweet earthly bonds, I believe in the cementing of still sweeter heavenly ones. I do not *see* the blessedness of heaven, the white robes, the palms, the harps of gold; and yet I am not disheartened because I cannot see them, for I believe so surely that God has promised them, that to me they are as the most real of all real things. I can praise Him for all that *He is going to do*, as truly as for all He has already done, and say ‘Glory to Thee for all the grace *I have not tasted yet.*’ And if, when first in heaven, I should for a moment or two be utterly amazed that such a sinner as I should be a ‘partaker of His glory,’ I think my tender Lord will just repeat to me His old question, even there: ‘*Said I not* unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?’”

XXXIV

SUBLIME DEVOTION VINDICATED

“Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.”—MATTHEW xxvi. 10.

MARY's anointing of Jesus in Simon's house has been beautifully called “a lyric prelude to the tragedy of Calvary,” for that tragedy was very near. In a few hours more her Lord would be in the olive-press of Gethsemane, bruised under the heavy millstones, till “His sweat was as drops of blood falling to the ground”; and in a few hours after that, He would be hanging on the Cross, the Sacrifice for the sin of the world. True to her character always, Mary was sitting at her Master's feet, drinking in His words, till the deep love of her heart quite overflowed, and by the symbolic outpouring of her fragrant oil she showed how gladly she would give her very best to Him who had given so much to her, who had been to her so great a Saviour, so great a Teacher, so great a

Comforter, so great a Friend. In this beautiful story, and in the question of the Master, I see three things: firstly, love most touchingly symbolised; secondly, love misrepresented and grudged by an unloving heart; and, thirdly, love nobly vindicated and immortalised by the Master Himself.

Perhaps the most prominent feature in this disciple was her unlimited power of loving. All disciples must be supposed to love their Lord, but all do not love Him equally, either in the same *way* or to the same *extent*. Few love as she did, and so to the heart of Jesus she stood above them all. She was His *ideal disciple*, if one might call her so—the disciple whose love more nearly than any other's corresponded to what a disciple's love should be—a love in which there was no mingling of unworthy elements, as there was so often in the love even of a Peter and a John.

And yet, poor soul, till Jesus vindicated her she had been half suspecting that she had been indiscreet! Every one was crying out against her, and, hearing the clamour, she feared she had made some mistake. For Jesus said, "Why trouble ye the woman? You are not only condemning this loving heart, you are causing it pain." He knew well how love of that deep type is a sensitive thing, and though not killed by want of sympathy, is wounded and chilled.

"To what purpose is this waste?" they cried.

That is always the tone of hard, prosaic men. Men of the Judas type cannot see anything noble in actions that are prompted only by love. There is a sort of superior disdain in the way they speak of such things. "Yes, very romantic, no doubt, but very sentimental and very useless too. Really, these people ought to calculate more closely what their schemes of philanthropy will cost. They are schemes from which there will be no return. If they choose to throw away their money on them that is their own affair, but the whole thing is a dead loss."

But the love the great Lord and Master most delights to see is a love that does not calculate by earthly profit and loss at all, a love that simply gushes out of the grace-filled heart, spontaneous and free. Great love never calculates the expense of showing it. If I ever find myself summing up the exact cost to myself of some love-token I am giving to a dear friend, I may be sure that my love, though genuine enough, is not very deep. An absorbing love scorns cold arithmetic.

Love, of Mary's warm, impulsive type, does sometimes make mistakes, and yet, practically, it accomplishes far more than that cautious wisdom which is also very cold. The men and women who have done most for the honour of their Lord and the good of the world have not been of the cold, calculating type, but had their hearts aglow with a great pity and a great com-

passion; and that love set them on doing what none else ever thought of doing or knew how to do. A loving heart is more original than the cleverest brains. There is a sort of genius in love for discovering original ways of doing good. Mary's act was exceedingly original—far too original and unique for the colder disciples at her side. The world rings with praise for “original *thinkers*.” Would that there were the same praise for original *workers* and original *givers*! If any one wants to be “original,” let him copy *perfectly* the example of his Master. That will soon make him the most unique Christian in all the world. It seems worthy of note that Mary did not consult with any of the other disciples before taking this way of showing her love. If she had, they would all have dissuaded her from it, and with great show of wisdom would have proved to her how useless it was. She consulted only her own loving heart, and yet proved that she was wiser than them all.

The Master's vindication of her act was *complete*, and it was also *beautiful*. They said it was meaningless and a waste. He showed them in a moment that it was neither the one nor the other: “She has wrought a good work on Me; she is anointing Me beforehand for My burial.” He saw deep into Mary's heart, saw that what He had so often said about His speedy death had sunk into *her* heart more than into any of theirs, that she

had prepared a tribute of affection for the day in which He would be lying dead, and that then the thought had come to her, "If His death is to be a death of violence and open shame, it may be impossible for me to do this then, but why should I reserve my offering of love for the coldness of death? I will anoint Him *now*; better that He should have my token of affection while living than only after He is gone." She thought that He at least would understand all this; and here He showed how completely He did—showed that He had been reading her loving thoughts, and had been gladdened by what He saw.

"Waste!" said the Master; "nay, this will be the seed of a harvest world-wide, the germ of charities innumerable to the end of time, of offerings to Me, in the persons of My poor brethren, greater far." Has not that alabaster box drawn forth the offerings of millions from Pentecost till now? Has not the sweet odour of that ointment perfumed not only the small chamber at Bethany, but the whole great temple of His Church in every land? Let me think of the ever-unfolding good that may result from even one devoted act, still more from one devoted life. Without aiming at fame, or thinking of it in the least, it may surely be a stimulating thought that my good may live on after me; that my holy influence in the world may be a seed that "bears fruit after its kind"; and that the world may be the purer and the

sweeter for having had me in it, though only for a few short years.

The carping objectors to Mary's gift stand now, even in the world's eyes, just where, to the Master's eye, they were standing then—on a far lower level than the humble woman whose only question was, "How best can I show my love?" It is surely a most significant fact that when Judas spoke of that act he called it "perdition"; "this waste of the ointment" is (literally rendered) "this *perdition* of the ointment"—not only waste, but utter loss; and that word of his has been made to cling for ever to himself! To latest ages he will be known as "the *Son of Perdition*": his whole life a waste and an utter loss! So true is it that "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Let me listen thankfully to my loving Master as He defends from calumny the poor disciple whose heart He knows. Let me also serve Him with my best, and serve Him *in my own way*, whether other disciples condemn me or not. But let me, as I sit and listen to His comforting voice, bethink me whether I am doing for Him what might call for a like approval. Can I take gladly all He gives to me, and then, when the next appeal to help Him comes, grudge Him the smallest token of my thankfulness? As I hear Him say, "She hath done what she could," let me honestly ask, Am I also doing all I can? Am I saying to myself,

“If my Lord and Saviour were only here, I *would* lavish on Him all that can show how truly I am His” ? Then let me listen still as He meets that profession of mine, “The poor ye have always with you, and whensoever ye will, ye can do them good ; and inasmuch as ye do it to one of the least of these My brethren, ye do it *unto Me.*”

XXXV

THE SERVANT-MASTER

“Whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as He that serveth.”—LUKE xxii. 27.

WHEN I look into that upper room where Jesus and His disciples were met, two wonders stand out to view; the shameful strife among them for the highest place, and the deep humility of the Master that made them all ashamed. Saddened exceedingly He must have been to see that they had even yet so very imperfectly learned His spirit; but there is no angry expostulation on His lips, no flash of holy indignation in His eye. He simply says, “Look at Me; am *I* striving for any pre-eminence? Am I seeking the highest place? I might rightly do it, but am I doing so? I am among you as He that serveth you all.”

How can I ever understand this wonderful humility? The great Christ, whom John afterwards in vision saw “holding the seven stars in

His right hand," stoops to use these hands in washing a sinner's feet! Knowing that the Father had *put all things into His hands*, He took a towel and girded Himself to do the lowest and the lowliest service to these pride-filled men! And He is just as willing to do the same for me to-day. I call Him *Master and Lord*, and I say well, for so He is. But is He my *servant* also? Yes, even so. But for this, I had never been saved; but for this, I could never be kept; but for this, I could neither be fitted nor admitted to sit down with Him at last.

"Among you as He that serveth." That single expression sums up the whole work and the whole character of this great Lord of my soul. It tells me of His servant-faithfulness, and it tells me of His servant-lowliness as well. "Making Himself of *no reputation*"! Could there be anything lowlier than that? The Lord of Heaven putting Himself on the low level of His lost creatures, to redeem them, carrying their burdens for them, washing their feet, taking on Himself their sicknesses, bearing their sins; and then, after speaking nothing but truth and love, and hearing Himself called "a blasphemer" for speaking it, after doing nothing but good, and hearing Himself called "a devil" for doing it, willing to die at their cruel hands as the vilest of sinners dies, willing to be hissed out of the world by the very men He came to save—there never was humility like that!

That was a depth of self-humiliation to which only Divine Love *could* stoop; but that aged Christian must have learned very fully what Divine Love is, when to the question, Do you not think it wonderful that the Lord of glory should have stooped so low for you? she replied, "No, it was not *wonderful* for Him to do it, for *it was just like Him*."

When I think of Jesus as the Serving One, I must begin by thinking of Him as a true and faithful *servant to God*, and only through that, being a loving *servant of men*. This servant-hood to the Father He was always speaking about: "I must work the work of *Him that sent Me*"; "As my Father *gave Me commandment*, so I do"; "I am come not to do My own will, but the will of *Him that sent Me*"; "I have finished *the work Thou gavest Me to do*." He who "sprang out of Judah" seemed on the Cross itself to echo the words of Judah regarding Benjamin, "Let me abide a bond-servant to my lord, and let Benjamin go free"; for that was really the place He took, the humiliation He was willing to accept, "made under the law to redeem them that were under the law." Like Jacob, who gained his bride by serving for her, He took the servant's place, did faithfully the servant's work, and then claimed His wages—the bride He had been serving for.

And it was out of this servant-hood to God that

there came His servant-hood to men. A *friend* of sinners? Yes. A *Saviour* of sinners? Yes; but more than that; a *servant* of sinners too! He gathered round Him just the men that needed to be served, and He spent His life in serving them. When in the synagogue of Nazareth He opened the book of Isaiah, and read His commission, "the spirit of the Lord is upon me, for *He hath sent me* to bind up the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised," He was rejoicing in the work of being a servant of sinners; and what a consecration of the Holy One for His merciful "ministry" was this! gathering together the children of sorrow, and poverty, and sickness, and sin, and fear, men with withered hearts and wasted lives and despairing souls, and calling all of them to His ministry of healing, as to a Bethesda whose angel never was absent, whose waters never were still. As I read the story of His life, I see that He never for a moment thought either of His own dignity or of His own ease, if there was a single help-needing one beside Him to be served in any way. Hungry Himself He fed the poor. A man of sorrows Himself He lifted the burdens of the sad. Weary Himself He went on serving the sick till far on into the night. I see Him one day, serving a guilty sinner at Jacob's well, drawing the living water for her out of His own deep well; another day, serving a

sorrowful one at the gate of Nain ; again, serving a tormented one at Gadara, breaking the demoniac's chains ; at Capernaum, Jerusalem, Jericho, serving the lame, the dumb, the blind. It was all one to Him *who* needed the service of His love, and whether the help needed was for the body or for the soul. Whosoever, wheresoever they were, He served them gladly and He served them all.

Me, too, He has been serving lovingly all my years. Bearing my heavy burdens has been His patient daily work for me, from the first hour I asked Him to do it. Carrying my messages to the throne and bringing back to me the answers that my Father gave, that also has been His servant-work in my behalf for many years ; washing the garments and the feet that I have soiled by sin ; preparing daily my heavenly food and setting it before me ; lighting for me my chamber lamp,—His smile of peace ; spreading for my weariness a couch of quiet rest,—the assurance of His love. It has been all a servant's work, and He who has been doing it is my great heavenly Lord ! He has been serving me long ; He is serving me still ; He tells me He will serve me to the very last. And even when heaven comes His servant-work will be continued there, for I read with wondering joy those words of His, "Blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching ; verily I say unto you, He will gird Himself and make

them to sit down to meat, and *will come forth and serve them.*"

If this is my Lord's chosen work, I cannot ask Him to do too much in my behalf. Never is He better pleased than when I give over into His hands every burden that oppresses me, not only the burden of my sins, but the burden of my sorrows and my cares. Close beside me every day is this strong serving Christ, who gives me the privilege of using *Him*, as the centurion made use of the servants under him; for I have but to ask Him to "go for me, and He goeth; to come to me, and He cometh; to do this for me, and He doeth it!" What an infinite honour is put on me by His grace, to have this glorious servant of the Father waiting to serve *me*, and always glad to be asked to do it! I would be both holier and happier if I *allowed* Him to serve me as fully as He longs to do; if I oftener asked Him to bring out to me the treasures of heaven to which He has access always; if I oftener asked Him to fill my empty vessels as well as to wash my earth-stained feet; if I only gave Him *all* my burdens to carry, the great and the small alike, as He is so willing to do. Let me think of Him to-day as standing ready to do for me what the servant in His own perfect parable did for the restored and wondering prodigal who was at home in the Father's house,—to "bring forth the best robe and put it on me, to put a ring on my hand

and shoes on my feet." If He is to "save me to the uttermost," it can only be by serving me to the uttermost. I must let Him do the *whole* work of saving me and sanctifying me, and not merely some of the more difficult bits of the work that I cannot do myself, and so when I hear my great Servant-Master saying, "If *I* wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me," I will say eagerly to Him, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from *all* my sin."

XXXVI

THE GREAT EXAMPLE

“ Know ye what I have done to you ? ”—JOHN xiii. 12.

YES, my Master ; in this great act of love, Thou hast given me a *great example* ; hast uplifted me with a *great consolation* ; and hast warned me of a *great danger*, which I am too apt to forget. My Master's example teaches me to be willing to lay aside every thought of personal superiority, if I can do the humblest of my brethren good. If my brother needs it, I am, even literally, to wash his feet ; but, whether it be by washing his feet, or filling his hand, or drying his tears, or covering his infirmities, or forgiving his faults, or praying for his soul, I am to imitate my Lord's perfect lowliness and perfect love. Some of my brethren have defects that detract from the beauty of their Christian character, failings that irritate and annoy me. Close contact with these brethren is somewhat disagreeable. They are, as I often say,

“difficult to get on with” ; and I am tempted to let my irritation get the better of my love ; to think of their soiled feet, congratulating myself that my own are clean ; to take my stand above them, parading, instead of covering, the infirmities that are so disagreeable to me ; and virtually saying to them, “Wash thy feet clean, before I will sit with thee.” “Nay, but,” says my Master, “ye ought to wash one another’s feet. Remember how defiling the dust of the world is to you as well as to them ; none can pass along its miry roads without soiling his feet ; instead, therefore, of proudly telling your brother to wash his feet, do you wash them ; do not condemn him simply, forgive him rather, and so be liker Me.”

How beautifully has the *curse of Canaan*, “a servant of servants shall he be to his brethren,” been turned by my great Master into the *blessing of the Christian and his glory too*, through likeness to Him who took the curse upon Himself, and became servant to all ! My only way of rising is, like Christ’s, to go down. The post of lowliest service is the post of highest honour. The towel with which He wiped His disciples’ feet far outshone the purple that wrapped Cæsar’s limbs. Shame to me that I should ever speak of lowly work in an obscure and humble sphere as “beneath my talents,” or “beneath my dignity,” and so should shrink from the disagreeable elements connected with some of the lowlier forms of

Christian service, forgetting that the glorious Christ laid aside His glory to save a world the hatefulness of whose sin must have been, to His feelings of repugnance, infinitely greater than the hatefulness of the lowest dens of vice can be to me. If the spirit of my Lord is in me at all, I shall be glad to do the meanest of all services to the meanest of all my brethren, and feel as Abigail did when she said to David, "Let me be a servant *to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord.*"

But, as I ponder my Master's words at this feet-washing, I see that He has given me a *great Christian consolation* too. I find that, in what He said to Peter, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit"; for, literally, what He said was this, "He that *has been in the bath* needeth not save to wash his feet." In the bath the whole body had been cleansed; but on the way from the bath to the feast-chamber the sandalled feet would become soiled again; but only the feet; and there was, therefore, no need for a repetition of the *bath*. My Master, transferring this to the region of spiritual things, speaks to me of *two* cleansings, both of which are needed; but one of which is needed only once, the other constantly. If I think of my whole life of faith as a single day, then, in the morning of that day, there is the bath of regeneration; that is where my new Christian life begins. At the evening of the day

there is to be the feast of heaven ; and between these two, lies the whole of my life-walk on earth. I am sinning ever, and need ever to be washed afresh from fresh pollution of the feet ; but I do not need for this a repetition of the *bath*. When I washed in the “fountain opened for sin,” I was regenerated once for all. This it is that gives me the right to be called a “child of God.” I was then “born from above,” and that privilege, as it cannot be lost, does not need to be repeated. However true it be, sadly true, that the soiling of my feet goes on—for daily contact with a polluting world cannot but leave some defilement on me, which mars my peace, as well as spoils my purity—and however true it be that from this daily defilement I must be daily cleansed by daily grace and daily forgiveness ; it still remains a blessed fact that when I was regenerated I was regenerated once for all—and have been ever since, and will be for evermore, a child in the Father’s house, having an assured position there, of which my infirmities do not deprive me ; so that if, at any moment, my *feet* were only cleansed, I would be “clean every whit,” would be as thoroughly “without spot and blameless,” even here, as I will be when the sanctification of my whole soul and body and spirit is at last complete.

And there may be *such moments* in my life, if I am trying honestly to keep in fellowship with God—moments when all the sin of the daily life is

so completely forgiven, and the holiness of my feelings and life is so perfect through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, that, if death were to come *just then*, no further washing even of the feet would be required before entering the palace of the King, and feasting with the undefiled.

Such moments will probably be rare. The holiness of such moments will probably be lost again very soon. Still, the possibility of being in such a state, occasionally at least, cannot be denied, if these words of my Master are true, "He is clean every whit." And, if so, I can easily see how, when death comes, and the feet that have been often washed before are washed for the last time, and pass in beyond the possibility of being defiled again, I should be, that moment, "*presented faultless* in the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy"—so faultless that I can bear to be in the presence of His glory, without shame and without fear. That "the souls of believers, when they die, are made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory," is, therefore, not merely the language of a human confession of faith; it is the verdict of Christ Himself.

Yet, let me not forget to listen to my Master's *great caution* too. His question, "Know ye what I have done to you?" shows me that, however truly regenerated at the first, there is no disciple that does not need, thereafter, a daily cleansing from daily sin. This was what He suggested so

vividly by washing these disciples' *feet*. But I may, perhaps, understand the Lord to point here to a still deeper truth, one that does not lie so much upon the surface as that. The "feet" may represent to me the *lower* activities of life; and His warning may be that it is in the realm of lower things, rather than in that of the higher, that my chief danger of defilement lies; not so much in the lofty exercises of spiritual worship and work (though even there sin may defile), as in the lower sphere of secular affairs, my daily contact with earthly things. To walk undefiled through the whole round of my social or commercial or political life is more difficult than to be holy in the sanctuary and the chamber of prayer; and yet, do I not condemn myself more for failures in the loftier departments of my Christian life than for failures in these lower ones? Do not my habitual confessions of sin refer more to shortcomings in my intercourse with *God*, than to failures in my intercourse with *men*? "Look to your *feet*," says Jesus, "let *them* be as clean as your hands and your head." Let me be well assured that, if my Master is dishonoured by me, it will be in the smaller things of life, or at least in the lower levels of life, rather than in the higher. It is in his contact with the world, and in his love of the world, that nearly every disciple finds his chief danger to lie, and therefore it is in the ordinary, rather than in the extraordinary,

duties of life, that he needs most to guard his inward purity. And past cleansings cannot be enough. These will leave untouched the life that has gone on beyond them. Life to every man is a constant novelty. New temptations are always rising up, and old ones confront him in new shapes. If I try to live merely on the strength of grace given me long ago, I will certainly fall. A daily cleansing I must have for daily sin ; and daily grace is as needful to me as daily bread.

XXXVII

ENTHUSIASM WITHOUT DEPTH

“Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied Me thrice.”—JOHN xiii. 38.

“Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone.”—JOHN xvi. 31, 32.

WHAT a sad outlook upon the disciples' faithlessness is revealed in these questions of the Master! They all meant honestly what they said; but He knew them better than they knew themselves. Beneath their ardent impulsive and quite sincere professions of devoted love, He saw an instability they never suspected, and knew well that in the testing hour their fancied strength would be only a broken reed. The sad failure of these disciples speaks loudly to all disciples still, and says, “let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.” It will be well for me to think of this more seriously than I do.

No fewer than four times had Peter, especially, been warned of his weakness, and of the sin into which that weakness would lead him, and yet he was so blind to his weakness, so proudly confident of his strength, that his fall came as unexpectedly to himself as though he had never been warned of it at all. There is no more humiliating page in the gospels than that which tells how Peter's pride led on to his threefold denial of the Master he yet loved so well. One would have thought that the very *minuteness* of Christ's foreknowledge, "thou shalt deny Me *thrice*," and "*this night*," and even "*before the cock crow*," would have startled Peter out of his dream of self-confidence. But nothing dies more hard than self-conceit; and so the strongest of all became the weakest of all, in that hour when danger on the one side and his cowardice upon the other, combined to ruin his steadfastness. No one knows how terribly far he may depart from truth, and honour, and God, if left to himself. Peter went far upon that awful road; and, but for the grace of God, and his patient Master's prayers, he would have gone farther still, till he had ended in an apostasy as complete as that of Judas himself.

Many a fortress has been taken by assault, not on its weakest but on its strongest side, because it was thought to be so impregnable there that no special watch against surprise on that side was required. It is said that it is the strongest

swimmers who are oftenest drowned at the coast, when disporting in the summer sea; because an overweening confidence in their power of endurance makes them venture too far out, and the fatal cramp seizes them, ere they know. Alas! this self-confidence has often proved to be my deadliest foe. I have ventured boldly where I ought rather to have shrunk back timidly. I have fancied myself superior to the very temptation that overpowered me. I have fallen because I was so foolishly certain I could stand. I have looked at sin in others, and have congratulated myself that in that direction at least there was no fear of *my* being overcome, and only by some sad experience of a fall I have been brought to acknowledge the truth that "Blessed is the man that *feareth alway*." For, if Satan can but ruin me, it matters nothing to him in what way he does it, whether by openly seducing me to become a brutish sensualist, or by flattering me into the fond belief that I am an established saint.

There is much food for serious thought in the strange fact that nearly all those good men, whose sins are recorded in the Book of God, failed precisely in those directions in which at other times their chief strength lay. Abraham, who so conspicuously walked by faith—"faithful Abraham,"—fell, by want of faith, into a double prevarication and lie. Moses, the meekest of men, forfeited his place in Canaan through a passionate word.

Solomon, the wisest of men, was guilty of the utter folly of bowing down to idols. Barnabas, the lovable peacemaker, had an angry quarrel with Paul. Peter the bold, was cowardly enough to deny his Lord. But, just as the seeds of fever are lurking in all manner of unsuspected places, and only await favourable atmospheric conditions to develop into widespread epidemics, so the seeds of evil are latent in every heart, and only require the favourable conditions of temptation to become open sins ; and thus, integrity at one moment in a Christian life is no absolute guarantee for integrity the next. In thinking of these disciples' self-ignorance, and the Master's knowledge of their inherent weakness, I see from what a height, and to what a depth, a fall is possible ; and I hear the salutary caution coming to myself, "be not high-minded, but fear." If I were to put a new heading to each page of the Bible histories, there are few indeed that would not need it to be this : "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

The Master's prediction was terribly verified in the case of all these disciples, very specially so in the case of Peter ; and I can find two reasons for his fall which come closely home to myself. First of all I see that Peter was *false to himself* before he was false to his Master. An acted lie preceded the spoken ones. He had put himself in a false position in the High Priest's hall, and,

to escape close scrutiny, had tried to pass himself off as one of the capturing band. He began by being ashamed of any connection with his Master, and, after that, a farther fall was not only easy, but inevitable. He gave a sad illustration of the progress downwards in evil so sharply described in the first Psalm. Beginning by "walking in the counsel of the ungodly," he next "stood in the way of sinners," as though he were one of them, and ended by "sitting in the seat of the scornful," for, cursing and swearing, he said, "I know not the man." Entering into temptation with a proud step, he found, as every one is sure to find, that, being left to himself, he fell.

Then, secondly, he had not calculated on meeting just *the kind* of temptation that actually came. When he said so valiantly, "I will lay down my life for Thy sake," he was thinking only of a fight with the sword; and he felt he *could* do that. He did draw his sword in the garden, and would have fought on to the bitter end, had not his Master said "Put up thy sword." If Christ's kingdom had to be won by arms, Peter would easily have led the van. But he never expected the kind of temptation, so dreadfully prosaic and mean, under which he fell. He had never even thought of such a thing as that, with no glamour of heroism about it at all. It is often so. I am often like one who is occupied with an enemy *in front*, and suddenly awake to the fact that the enemy is *behind*. I

fortify myself against defection, by arguments based on the supposition that danger will confront me only at some definite time and in some definite way, and when it appears in a way and at a time completely different, my unguarded faith gives way. I need to ponder this disciple's own advice, "Be sober, and be *vigilant*."

And now, if Peter's fall cautions me, Peter's restoration comforts me. He was a true disciple at heart; and the Good Shepherd never loses any of His sheep. The bitter tears of the penitent disciple, and his Master's reinstatement of him in his forfeited place, prove that. Yet let me not think or say that a fall like his matters little, if recovery and pardon follow it. A genuine Christian's temporary fall has often ruined many whom his repentance could not save. The growth of evil from the sowing of one evil seed he cannot prevent; and no more bitter thought can sadden a restored backslider's heart than the thought that, by his declension and fall, he has done harm to other souls, which not even his remorseful tears and prayers can ever undo. Though it be a great truth that came afterwards from Peter's lips, that I am "kept, through faith, by the power of God, unto salvation," there is a truth deeper than that, viz., that my faith itself needs a keeper, else it will not resist the temptations of a single day. There is certainly no necessity that a Christian should fall. My life of faith might be a life of

victory all along, if I only allowed the Holy Spirit of God to have full possession of me. If the grace of Christ is allowed free course within me, it will be impossible for me to sin. I shall never take a false step. But it is just there that the infirmity of my faith reveals itself. It is so difficult to keep *every channel* of the soul free for the inflow of that grace—and with failure there, all other failures begin.

Whenever, therefore, I am tempted to flatter myself that from some kinds of temptation I am in no danger at all, let me remember Peter's *pride*. When I think I can do, even for an hour, without watchfulness and prayer, let me remember Peter's *fall*. And if, for the sake of anything on earth, I am tempted to be ashamed of Christ, let me remember Peter's *tears*.

XXXVIII

NEAR, AND YET UNKNOWN

“Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?”—JOHN xiv. 9, 10.

PATHTIC questions these! What a tone of grieved disappointment there is in them! All these long years of closest companionship with Him, all His teachings, all His wondrous works gone for so little! It saddened the Lord to find how unspiritual in understanding Philip still was; how he and all the rest were still so utterly blind to the real glory of Him in whom the Father had been walking beside them and speaking with human voice. “Ye have already seen the Father,” said Jesus; and they only lifted up amazed faces, and asked, “Where?” “When?” “How?” “*Show us the Father and it sufficeth us,*” said wondering Philip. He wanted some ecstatic vision which

might help him to realise what "going to the Father" meant. If he could only get one glimpse within the veil, all his doubts would be at rest. Little though he suspected such a thing, he was as yet on no higher *spiritual* plane than the thick-witted Pharisees who asked "a sign from heaven" that they might believe. This very unspiritual disciple was still walking by sight instead of by faith, and so he had missed seeing the very truth he had been longing for. "For three years," said Jesus to him, "the Father has been before your eyes. When you listened to My words you were hearing the Father's voice; when you watched My works you were seeing the Father's hand. You have already seen, in Me, all that you will ever see of the Father on this side of heaven; perhaps all you will ever see, even there. I and the Father are one. *I am in the Father*, for I have no word, no will, no act of My own apart from Him; and the *Father is in Me*, for all that He is, I am."

There is unquestionably a profound mystery here, the deepest of all mysteries; a mystery whose depth cannot be fathomed by any man. But then I am not required to fathom it. I am asked simply to believe it on the authority of Him who is the Absolute Truth. Even Christ does not propose to make my understanding of it plain. He appeals to His works to prove it; but, ultimately, my acceptance of it can only be an act of trust. Philip's mistake was not that he could not solve

the mystery, but that he did not see there was any mystery to be solved. The Lord Jesus had been to him little more than a wise human Teacher, a dear earthly friend. He had no *conception* of such a thing as a God-man. He knew of a Father, he knew of a Son, but he never for a moment imagined they could be one and the same. And there was much to justify his view. Jesus had often spoken of Himself as “coming from” and “going to” the Father. Himself standing beside them on earth, He had taught them to look up and say, “Our Father, *which art in heaven.*” They had seen Him lift His own eyes to heaven and pray to His Father *there*. And with that side of the truth so prominent, it was difficult for them to see its other side, or to know what He could mean when He called Himself “the Son of Man *who is in heaven.*”

This deep mystery is one before which I am dumb—that the Son of man should say “Thou” to the Father, that the Father should say “Thou” to the Son, and yet that that Son should say, “I and the Father are so one that I am in the Father and the Father in Me; he that hath seen me hath seen the Father”—it is high; I cannot attain to it.

And yet my perplexity may somewhat disappear, if I think of the life of Jesus upon earth as being simply the invisible and *omnipresent* God putting on a visible form that only enfolded a presence

always there, but made itself capable, for a short season, of being seen ; for the scriptural conception is not *God and Christ*, it is “*God in Christ*.” I really know God only in Him. Perhaps I shall never know Him in any other way ; perhaps my only vision of God to all eternity may be “in the face of Jesus Christ.” But where reasoning staggers, a simple faith can stand ; and this is my faith, that seeing Christ, I see the Father ; having Christ, I have the Father also. “*Emmanuel, God with us*,” is a truth over which self-wise men will stumble to the last ; but it is a truth at which simple hearts never stumbled, and never will. This “mystery of the kingdom of heaven,” like all others, is “hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes.”

Whenever, therefore, I listen to my Lord, I will listen *upon my knees*. I will *worship* Him who speaks to me of His wondrous glory, and I will ponder the *comfort* of this truth as well as its glory ; for if the life of Jesus was just the *human life of God*, how very near the Most High has come to me in His Son ! how perfect a revelation of the heart of the Most High is given me in the words and acts of the Son ! If I have not the consolation of knowing that my Saviour is very God, I lose the whole comfort of His life and death and reign and coming again ; I am robbed of the one thing that sustains me in the fears and doubts and discouragements of my own life here. It is no barren dogma this ; it is not

one which I may receive or let alone without damage to my hopes. If my Saviour be not the Eternal God, I could not be safe or happy for a day. The mystery of it I confess, but a God whom I can perfectly fathom would be no God to me ; a religion without mystery would not satisfy me, or give me rest. There *is* rest, however, for me here ; for this mysterious union of the Father and the Son draws out and deepens my confidence in both. I am not perpetually asking whether Christ's words are really the Father's voice, or whether Christ's promises, as from the Father, will be honoured by the Father ; for my faith rests in this : "I and the Father are one," and so I make my anchor fast within the veil.

And yet how slow I am to realise all that this means to me ! My Lord may well say to me what He said to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me ?" Surely I have never known Him as I ought, *otherwise God would not seem to me, as He sometimes does, so unsympathetic and cold* ; a God enthroned in majesty in some distant heaven, but not near enough or human enough to care much about me, or be a real helper to me in my need.

I do not know Him as I ought, *otherwise I would not misjudge Him as I do*. He has been infinitely tender and loving in all my *past* experience of Him. Why cannot I trust Him still ? In times of bewildering doubt, arising from crushing grief, He

comes to me and says, "Hast thou not known Me in the past? Why not believe Me again to-day?" Really to know Him is to know a love that never changes and never fails. To doubt that love in *new* emergencies is only to prove that I have never known Him in the old.

I do not know Him as I ought, *otherwise I would not be so world-loving as I am*. He shows me, in His own life, what my chief aim in mine should be: not to be great, not to be popular, not to be rich, but "to do the will of my Father who is in heaven." I call myself by His name; I profess to "walk even as He walked," to "have the same mind in me that was in Him;" and yet how sadly different my self-pleasing, world-loving life from His! Do I really *know* my Master even yet, when I am straining my energies to secure all that the world can give, or worrying about the future, measuring my poor resources to see if they will meet all manner of imagined evils lying in front? Let me think more of my unworldly Master, who simply lived upon the Father's care, and for the Father's glory. Let me see Him bending over me and saying, with heavenly pity in His tone, "Poor, troubled, doubting, anxious one, hast thou not known Me yet?"

I do not know Him as I ought, *otherwise I would not doubt His forgiveness after fresh sin*, as I often do. Sin daily saddens and shames me; and it sometimes seems as if He could not go on for-

giving me day after day, but must be wearied out with me and give me up. But I do not *know* Him if I think He will. He who gave His disciples a rule for *their* forgiveness acts upon it Himself, "not until seven times, but until seventy times seven." I long, too, to be free from the *power* of sin. I struggle and resolve and pray, but all in vain. The old failures constantly recur, till hope of victory is quenched. In this case, also, let me hear my pitying Lord saying, "Hast thou not known Me yet as One who can save to the uttermost, and give, not pardon only, but perfect victory as well?"

I do not know Him as I ought, *otherwise I would not doubt that He will "deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me to His heavenly kingdom."* Oh, for a deeper knowledge of *all* that this Almighty Christ can do!

XXXIX

THE MORNING OF JOY

“Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me, and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me?”—JOHN xvi. 19.

SOME of the Lord's questions were meant to *rebuke* curiosity, but some were meant rather to *excite* it. Many of His sayings were purposely enigmatical, that dull hearts might be stirred up to ask what His meaning really was. What He had just been saying was a riddle to them; and though a riddle is always simple when we have the key, it was precisely the key to this one that none of them had. He did not rebuke them for their ignorance. He knew that they *could* not solve the difficulty, and so, as He saw them puzzling helplessly over it and awed into silence in His presence, so that they did not dare to ask Him what He meant, He was filled with compassion for them, and introduced the subject Himself. And yet, as I read His words, it seems strange that He gave them no farther light.

Was it not because a few weeks more would show them, on Olivet, what "going to the Father" meant? and because the chief thing that puzzled them, His seven-times repeated "a little while," was such a small thing after all? All the *great* matters He had been discoursing about passed over their heads, but when He came to matters of chronology, mysterious appearances and disappearances, they were awake enough, and interested at once. They were only children yet, and put childish questions, to which He would give no answer then. A few weeks more, and all would be plain; but meanwhile they must wait.

The Church of to-day has need to take this lesson home; for the same foolish eagerness to know the "when" of the Lord's coming, and to puzzle over questions of chronology and dates, is too rife among disciples still. Let me rather think of the great *purpose* of His appearing, and help that on, than perplex myself with bewildering speculations and guesses about the *hour*.

But what did the Master really mean by His "little while" of absence, and His "coming again"? I cannot think He was referring *only* to the three days that would elapse till they saw Him risen, and "were glad"; for His "going to the Father" was to take place *before* the sight that would turn their sorrow into joy. I cannot think He meant that they would have a *spiritual* vision of Him after Pentecost; for the "not seeing" and

the "seeing" were evidently to be the *same kind* of sight, not physical in one case and spiritual in another, but both of them the seeing with the bodily eye. It is just this, indeed, that continues to make His promise cheering to me, and to all the Church till earth's latest day. The seeing of the Lord is still its "blessed hope," and mine ; and so, when He tells me that His absence will be only for "a little while," the great hope springs to life within me, that His "glorious appearing" may be far nearer than I think ; for He does not reckon time by earthly years, and that may seem to Him exceedingly short which seems to me almost unendurably long.

I will "comfort myself, therefore, with these words." As I listen to this kindly *au revoir*, "I will see you again," I will think of Him as one who, in taking leave for a season, leaves His heart behind Him, and will not be absent one moment longer than He must ; one who, all through the years of absence, continues loving those He has left behind, continues thinking, planning, praying for them, and is every day anticipating the joyous hour when, His *heavenly* work being as gloriously "finished" as His *earthly* work was, He will be able to "come again and receive them to Himself, that where He is they may be also." I will think of Him as not really absent, after all, but near me still, far nearer than He could have been had He remained below ; but I will also think of Him as

soon to show Himself to my bodily eye, when the "redemption of the body" has come, and I have an eye that can bear the blaze of His glory and "see Him as He is." It is a blessed hope; and yet I echo the words of one who loved Him well, "Thou callest it a little while; O my Lord, it is a long, long little while; come, Lord, come quickly." Why should I so desire the speedy coming of my Lord? He gives me one reason for that when He says "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy": and I think He means not only sorrow for His absence, but *all* sorrow, sorrow of every kind, sorrow in life and sorrow in the soul; those sorrows especially which only His coming *can* take finally away: the sorrows that come from the presence of sin on the earth, and the dimming of His glory by a scornful world and an unfaithful Church.

I cannot but anticipate eagerly the passing away of all sorrows from my own personal life, and the finding of these not merely *succeeded* by joy but "*turned into*" joy; so that the very things that now cause my tears shall be the subject of my songs. But *this* will come to me the first moment I am within the veil, when I will be able to look back and read the hieroglyphics of God's love, which now I can but dimly understand. I will see clearly then what here I cannot always see, the golden thread that ran underneath the darkest portions of the web of life, a thread that, though often hid, was never broken from first to last.

But this, after all, is a thing that concerns myself alone. There is another and even higher joy awaiting me, which can be mine only when my Lord comes back to reign—the joy of seeing a world from which all sorrow has been banished, because sin, the cause of the sorrow, has been everywhere destroyed. It is not my own personal release from suffering that makes me long for that bright day. It is that the *whole world's* release will be accomplished then. The world is a long way yet from being the blessed dominion of God's Christ; and, if I do not misjudge them, many Christians do not seem to be much distressed by that sad fact. It needs one to be in fuller sympathy with Christ than contents most of His disciples, to feel acutely the dishonour done to Him by the world's sin, or to be really saddened by the slow progress of His kingdom. Yet there are some—let me be one of them—who know how depressing is the thought of this, and how vain the struggle for Christ's supremacy seems to be; prayers, efforts, tears alike as if thrown away; sin as rampant as ever; Satan seated as securely on his throne as ever; the tares growing everywhere faster than the wheat; till the cry of their hearts is a half-despairing “how long, O Lord? how long? Are the kingdoms of the world ever, at this rate, to become the kingdom of Thy Son?”

But the blessed hope shines out, that what all human effort cannot do, Christ Himself is coming

to do. I know that there will be wonderful things accomplished yet by increasing faith and prayer: that there will be marvellous outpourings of the Spirit from on high; that there will be displays of His converting and sanctifying power on a scale so large as to make all previous displays of them look poor. Still, all these will not make earth a heaven, nor even a satisfying miniature of heaven. It will need the sweep of Christ's own judgment-sword to purge the world finally of its sin, and bring in the righteousness and peace that will endure for ever. I, and all who love Him, are only like King David, eager to build God's temple, but not permitted; and all that He says to us is this: "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." But Solomon, the "Prince of Peace," is yet to come, and "*He* shall build the temple of the Lord, and *He* shall bear the glory." It is a joyful hope that I may *live* to see it; at least I know that I shall *die* to see it: for He *shall* come; and then the long sin-cursed earth shall be the "new earth" where the "new life" shall be complete, the "new name" shall shine out on every face, and the "new song" shall be on every lip. As I think of this my heart is glad, and I ask Him how *I* can hasten that day; how I can work on earth as He is doing in heaven, "expecting till His enemies be made His footstool." For if this is meant to be a *comforting* hope, it is meant to be a *quicken*ing hope as well. "Seeing I look for such things,

what manner of person ought I to be?" I would not have my Lord surprise me, either in my sleep or in my slothfulness. I would not be "ashamed before Him at His coming." It was a good rule given for a holy walk, "live as if you were sure to die to-night"; but I think an even better rule would be this, "Live as if your Lord would come before to-morrow." Let me learn to "watch and pray that I may be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of Man," and echo the words of John Milton, written amid the distractions of his troubled time:—

"Come, Thou that hast the seven stars in Thy right hand,
Re-light the golden candlestick that has long been dimmed;
Appoint Thy chosen priests to minister before Thee; come
Forth out of Thy royal chamber, O Prince of all the earth,
Put on the robes of Thy imperial majesty, take up the
Universal sceptre which Thy Father hath bequeathed
To Thee; for the voice of Thy Church is calling for Thee,
And all Creation sighs to be renewed."

XL

A NOBLE TESTIMONY

“When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing.”—LUKE xxii. 35.

It was a noble testimony these disciples bore to their Lord and Master, and it was hearty too. He had just been acknowledging that they had been *faithful to Him*, “continuing with Him in His temptations,” and now He asks if He had not been *faithful to them*. He had sent them forth to the kingdom’s work in the same condition as He went to it Himself, in absolute dependence on the daily providence of God: and all their wants had been supplied; for He had never lost sight of them for a moment, and it was He that inclined the hearts of others to be kind to them. They had not *always* shown themselves to be trustworthy disciples; but He had always shown Himself to be the most trustworthy of Masters, and when He asked them if His promises had not come true, they gladly answered “Yes.”

He is calling for a like testimony from me to-day ; and I, too, can give it joyfully. Sadly though I have failed in my duty to Him, He has never failed in His love to me. Long ago I said, "He is my Shepherd, and I *shall not* want" ; now, after years of experience, I can say "Goodness and mercy *have* followed me all the days of my life." "Not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord spake concerning me ; all is come to pass." I remember how, once, I stood at the gateway of my life, looking out into the strange, untrodden, unfamiliar country in front, which I would soon need to cross. I looked out with vague guessings and fond hopes, with ardent wishes and whispered fears ; but I put myself trustfully for all the journey into the keeping of my Lord ; and He undertook the work both of guidance and of provision : and now I see how wisely and lovingly I have been led, how good and patient with me He has always been, forgiving my foolish fears, overruling my mistakes, "crowning me with loving-kindness and tender mercy" all along. Always over me were the wings of His love. Always underneath me were His "everlasting arms." I can give thanks to this Lord of my life, "for He is good and His mercy endureth for ever" ; and as one of the "redeemed of the Lord" I will "*say so.*" If He wants my testimony He shall have it with my whole heart : "I have lacked nothing."

If I do not praise my God sufficiently, if ever my heart-song is hushed, if my praise-harp gives out no music because of broken strings, it is only because I have such a treacherous memory for the gentle ministrations of His continual care ; because I let a few *occasional* sorrows obscure His *abiding* goodness ; and because I do not get low enough to feel that I am not worthy of even the smallest mercies of His holy hand. There has been enough in my life to make material for murmuring if I dwell only upon the darkness ; if I forget the great wonders of His love, and magnify the small troubles that have now and then been mingled with them ; but there will be more than enough to make me ashamed of a single murmuring word if I only think back, and see how tender and pitiful and good my God has ever been. According as I look at it, I can make my review of life either bright or dark ; and there are facts for both. But then the facts that feed my gloom are only partial and superficial ; the facts that call for praise are deep and everlasting.

I do not wonder at my God complaining, as He so often did, of that old people whom He led through the wilderness for forty years, that they were always forgetting His goodness when any fresh trial came ; for that has been my sin too. They complained of sufferings, but really theirs was not a suffering life by any means. It was full of strange mercies from first to last. Bread fell

daily to them out of the heaven above them ; a river of cool water followed them for their thirst ; they had the merciful shadow of the overspreading cloud to temper the heat and glare of the desert, and its mighty gleam of fire to brighten the camp ; “ their raiment waxed not old upon them, neither did their foot swell, these forty years ” ; and yet a few occasional privations of needless luxuries made them cry out as if their God had done them a bitter wrong !

That has been *my* folly too. If my God were to recount to me, from *His* unfailing memory, all that He has done for me in the years that lie behind me, I would be both amazed and shame-stricken at my forgetfulness of His love ; and if He were to ask me whether I have lacked any one thing of all the good He promised me, I could only “ abundantly utter the memory of His great goodness,” and say “ I have lacked nothing.”

Can I not trustfully anticipate a continuance of this great goodness still ? The logic of faith is this, “ He hath been with me in six troubles, and in seven He will not forsake me.” There are rich manifestations of my Lord’s goodness which He has never shown me yet, but which He is keeping in reserve ; and He will give me all of them according to my need : as Bunyan quaintly puts it, “ The Lord has many bags of mercy lying by Him, the seals of which He has never broken yet.” My testimony to-day, as I look at part of my life, will

be my testimony at the end, as I look at the whole ; and therefore I will ask my grateful memory to help me to a trustful hope. “I *have* lacked nothing,” and I am sure I never *shall*. Though I cannot see even one day’s march ahead, “I will trust and not be afraid.”

Pilgrims through time, unlike pilgrims through space, must necessarily be ignorant of the region in front. There are no maps of it to consult, no reports from previous explorers to study. There is not even a mount of vision to which, like Moses, one might climb to see the land afar. My future upon earth is to me all unknown. I only know that if I have the hidden secrets of God in front of me, I have the wings of God to overshadow me, the hand of God to lead me, the presence of God to cheer me, the great Lord, to whom past and present and future are all alike, to be my guide and guard for ever.

A celebrated German mystic used to write in the albums of his friends, “He to whom time is as eternity, and eternity as time, is delivered from all strife.” The saying looks enigmatical, and was meant to be so ; but the meaning is clear. He who possesses the love and care of the changeless God has eternity even here ; and knowing that the same perfect love is over both, he will be delivered from all strife. The strife of outward trouble will not move him, and from the strife of a restless heart or discontented mind he will be completely

free. Abiding in God he will be lifted out of time into God's eternity, which knows nothing of time, and so have the peace of that eternity even now. To feel all this is part of the daily bread of heaven which my Father in heaven gives me to eat. To think of His love as being anything lower than this is to dishonour Him. To say on bent knee, "My Father," and then, rising up, to live as though mine were an orphaned life; to say, "I believe in His love, but it is only in heaven; I believe in His power, but it stops short at the stars; I believe in His providing care, but that was limited to the old Scripture saints," what can be more dishonouring to my Lord than this? The largest hopefulness of future goodness is the only valid conclusion from my experience of His goodness in the past. I will not care much for the roughness of the way if He gives me "Shoes of iron and brass." It will not matter much what the days may bring, if, "As my days, my strength shall be." Trials many I may have to face; but only my unbelief can make them calamities. *All* will not be dark—*nothing* will be dark, if from the shining of His face I have the Light of life.

And why should I be anticipating evils, instead of blessings, when such a God is mine? Is life to be filled with mournful sunsets only? Are there to be no beautiful sunrises too? The coming days stand before me, like empty vessels waiting to be filled. If I myself fill them up with my forebodings and

alarms, what they hold will be bitter enough. But if I suffer God to fill them, they will overflow with the good wine of His joy. And when, at last, the journeyings are over, the wilderness is passed, and the fights are done, and my loving Master, in the good land beyond, asks me to look back and say whether on earth, while serving Him, I ever lacked anything I did really need, my thankful lips will have only this to answer, "Nothing."

XLI

ICHABOD

“Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”—MARK xiii. 2.

Few words ever fell from the Master's lips more sadly pathetic than these. He had just left the temple, never to enter it again. The crowds came next day, as usual, expecting to hear Him once more; but He was not there. His last appeals had been made. He would never again speak to them either of their sins or of His own grace. Their house would thenceforth, as He said, be “left unto them desolate.” Desolate indeed it was, when He, the glory of it, had gone away, leaving it to its doom; and desolate utterly it has been ever since. The Jews themselves have recorded that just forty years before the final destruction of the city, the temple-lamp suddenly and mysteriously went out. Fitly so, when the True Light had been quenched by rejection of its shining.

This coming doom, however, no eye but His could see. To every other eye such a doom seemed utterly incredible. The very disciples who had just listened to His sorrowful and tearful lament, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and ye would not! if thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace—but now they are hid from thine eyes"; even these disciples could not take in the idea of its doom. They pointed to the "great buildings," built to defy the hand of time itself, buildings "adorned with goodly stones and gifts," and said, "Is all this magnificence to perish utterly? Even if the *city* be doomed, surely that *temple* will be spared: it has been, for ages, not merely a splendid, but a sacred place; surely nothing will be suffered to harm *it*." But to the Lord Himself the mere magnificence of the temple was nothing. When it ceased to be a true temple of true worship for true hearts, it was, to Him, simply a great ruin. Already, to the eye of the Master, its glory was a vanished thing, and soon the desolation of it would be irreversible and complete.

I would like had it been possible for Him to tell what glorious vision of the *might-have-been* it was that passed before His eye, but could not pass His lips, when He said "Oh if thou hadst known"—

and stopped ere the sentence was complete. Can I venture, reverently, to imagine it? If Jerusalem had but known her Saviour, and known her day of visitation by that Saviour's grace, how different might have been the fate of her and of all her children! Perhaps then the temple might have stood for ages, might have been standing yet, as the grand metropolis of the kingdom of God on earth. He, as the Lamb of God, might still have been offered up, but without cruel hands being dipped in His blood. He might Himself have ascended the altar, as the Priest-victim for men, and offered Himself up in fire from heaven. Moses and Elias might have again appeared beside Him, proclaiming the accomplishment of the purposes of God; and Jerusalem, as the scene of that "reconciliation," might have been enthroned in imperishable glory to the end of time. It is perhaps only a baseless fancy; but if anything like this was the vision that flashed for a moment before His eye, I can perhaps understand better His prayer to escape the *shame* of the cross: at least, I can see what pathos there must have been in His tone as He said, "Of all this magnificence there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

How constantly still does the Lord look far beneath the glittering surface of things, and write "Ichabod" upon the pretentiousness of a religion that is satisfied with what is outward only—noble

architecture, stately ritual, ravishing music—but, wanting everything really spiritual, is only a super-refined earthliness after all! It is a ruin, even *before* it is destroyed.

It was a most significant walk that Jesus took through the temple courts on the evening of the day when He had been welcomed by the hosannas of the crowd. The story is very simply told. “He entered into the temple, and looked round upon all things,” and then went out. No word was spoken; He only “looked” at all that were there and at all that was going on. But what a keen look it was! a look that missed nothing, that read the secrets of every soul! How little did priest or Levite suspect that He was noting the hollowness of all their pretended religion and mentally pronouncing it a sham!

But if that same Christ were to go through the pews of many a house of worship to-day, would He not have the same feelings there as He had in Jerusalem’s temple nineteen centuries ago? Not only of many a magnificent cathedral with long-drawn aisles and intoning priests, but of many a less pretentious church, where nothing but the strictest orthodoxy is preached, and where all the conventionalities of decorous worship are scrupulously observed, might He not feel and say that the religion of the worshippers is not a religion of the spirit, but only of the flesh?

This prediction of Jerusalem’s doom may there-

fore be a salutary warning to all Churches still. Their glory and their very existence will pass away if they cease to be real meeting-places between God and human souls, or if Christ, as the one Foundation of a sinner's hope, is refused the place He desires to fill. No substitute for Christ as the accepted Lord of the worshippers can save a church from perishing miserably as a useless and God-dishonouring thing. Not wealth and costly gifts, not learning, not gorgeousness of ritual, not beauty of ceremonial, not splendour of architecture, not sublimity of music, not even crowds of worshippers can save it from becoming, like Jerusalem's temple, spiritually dead, if Christ, in the glory of His redeeming work, is put into the background, whatever may be put in front.

When the Saracens invaded the lands where apostles had laboured once, they found plenty of magnificent churches, with beautiful and stately services, and all the outward signs of a large prosperity; but they found no longer any preaching of Christ and of His Cross as the one atonement for sin. In *symbol*, the Cross was everywhere. It shone on the top of gilded domes; it blazed upon the altars; it sparkled on the vestments of the priests; but in the *preaching*, the Cross was nowhere. What rang out from sacerdotal lips was salvation by the sacraments, not by Christ; access to God through a human priesthood, not through Christ; acceptance with God by human merit, not

by Christ ; and so the sword of the destroyer was unsheathed to sweep these Christless Churches away. But no Church has ever died, or can die, where Christ Himself, in His peerless glory, has been the joy of all the worshippers. Even the meanest barn, where the presence of Christ is felt, is a nobler temple than the most gorgeous cathedral without that can be.

I cannot but remember another thing that led to the old temple's doom. Both at the beginning and at the end of His ministry the Lord Jesus indignantly rebuked the spirit of merchandise that had invaded the temple court, and turned what should have been a "place of prayer" into a "den of thieves." Is there anything that, in this day too, more tarnishes the honour of God's house than the worldliness that infects it, eating out its spirituality, defiling its purity, hindering its testimony, and making it the laughing-stock of the profane? When I think of the deference paid in the churches to mere worldly rank and wealth, the dependence placed on mere worldly attractions, the worldly devices by which funds are raised for the work of the Church,—even sometimes, as I have seen, by theatrical performances and fancy-dress balls,—I ask myself sadly what my Lord must think of this profaning of His house, and how *He* would speak of such things if He were here with His scourge of cords in His hand ; I ask myself if such churches are really filled with His Spirit as they

profess to be, really depending only on Him, as they profess to do, really seeking His glory above all else, as they tell the world they are. How can *He* walk in His temple if the world is welcomed to walk there too? Oh that His Church everywhere might be greatly purified by His Spirit of holiness! Then would that Spirit be upon it as a Spirit of Power. If *I* cannot do much to bring a holier day, I can at least keep praying that the Lord would be a spirit of burning to consume all this sin, lest He come as an avenging fire to consume the Church itself, in which His glory is so sadly dimmed.

XLII

GETHSEMANE-SLEEP

“He findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”—MATTHEW xxvi. 40, 41.

“He cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest *thou*? Couldst not *thou* watch one hour?”—MARK xiv. 37.

“Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”—LUKE xxii. 46.

I AM here on holy ground. I will put off my shoes in reverence. I am looking into the Holy of Holies, where all is mystery. The darkness hides my agonising Lord; but out of the darkness comes to me His voice, solemn yet marvellously gentle, compassionate exceedingly even in its rebuke. I see here sin and grace lying very close together; the disciple's sin, the Master's grace. It is an affecting revelation of the inherent weakness of the best disciples. Had I been there I would probably have been no better than they.

What He wanted them to do was no great thing,

merely that when He was withdrawn from them in lonely prayer for Himself, they should watch against surprise, and pray for strength to endure whatever might be at hand. They were to watch *with* Him, not *over* Him. He had to go through *this* agony, as all others, alone. He never at any time asked His disciples to pray *for* Him. He never even prayed *with* them, though He constantly prayed *for* them. He does not now ask them to intercede for Him, only to pray for themselves. All life through He was as One apart, doing a work in which none could bear Him company. He often asked their *faith*; He asked their *love*; He asked their *sympathy*; but He never asked their *prayers*. He only showed them, by word and by example, how to pray.

How sad His heart was under the olive-trees they could not know; but the sadness was deepened when, coming back to them for a moment, He found them so little like Himself as to be all asleep. A sin of infirmity, no doubt; but what a revelation of the infinite distance separating Him from them! This sleep could perhaps be explained, naturally enough, by reaction of mind after the tense excitement of the day—the pasover and supper in the upper room, the long discourse, the wonderful prayer they heard Him offer, the hymn they had together sung, the walk in the darkness to the garden, and the slumberous murmurs of the night wind in the olive-trees; and

yet it takes me by surprise. I could have expected something better than this. The Master evidently expected something better too. Even His generous excuse for them does not hide His disappointment. Even the palliation that they were "sleeping for sorrow" does not hide it either, for there is an accent of surprise in His words, "Why sleep ye?" "Simon, sleepest *thou*?"

It is strangely full of warning to me that the three men who here could not watch for one hour were the same three who had been, more closely than any, associated with the Master many times before: who, alone of the band, had been with Him on the holy mount, and had seen His glory there; who alone had been witnesses of His power in raising the daughter of Jairus to life; one of them, too, the man who had made loudest profession of willingness to die for Him; another, the man who most profoundly loved Him, and at the supper leaned upon His breast. But the secret of their unwatchfulness is clear enough. They had never yet completely taken in what He had so often said to them about the coming *cross*. They could not even yet bring themselves to believe that He would really die—die so awfully, die so soon. And they were also completely ignorant of their own weakness. They credited themselves with a valiant faith that existed only in their own imaginations. They were full of the self-security and self-confidence that always precede a fall.

I see here, then, that there are some disciples from whom the Master *expects more* than He does from others, and that these are just the disciples who have had the loftiest privileges, and have made the loudest profession of loyalty and love. I see, too, that as I am never more likely to err in judgment than when I think myself most wise, so I am never more ready to slip with my feet than when I am saying, "*I shall never be moved.*" I have had far greater privileges than even Peter had. If I am unwatchful, and let my Lord's interests be betrayed, He may with even more reason say to me, "*Sleepest thou?*"

I cannot always say, "I sleep, but my heart waketh," for often my heart is drowsier than my frame. I sleep sometimes from self-indulgence, not from weariness. I sleep because I cease to *feel* acutely the danger that may be near. My sleep is too often the sleep of earthly-mindedness, in which I have pleasant dreams, but they are all of earthly, and not of heavenly things ; visions indeed, but not visions of a glory that excelleth, only of the world that passeth away. When I think of my indolence in my Master's service, of my indifference to His glory, of my self-indulgence when He is calling for the sacrifice of self in His behalf, I am forced to feel that I am not *living* my life, but *sleeping it away*. Well for me that my Master does not sleep when caring for *my* interests, as I do when entrusted with *His* ! If my Lord were not

more mindful of His promises to me than I am of mine to Him I would be undone for ever.

I see again that Jesus conquered *His* temptation in the garden by meeting it *with prayer*. The disciples succumbed to *their* temptation because they met it *without prayer*. In a temptation to rebellion against the Father's will, the Lord's resource was prayer. In a temptation to cowardice, that ought to have been theirs. Prayer would have made them conquerors, as it made Him; and therefore when temptation of any kind, from any quarter, in any form, at any time, comes to me, I will listen to my Master's voice, "Why sleepest thou? Rise and pray." No temptation to any Christ-dishonouring act would ever overpower me if it did not find me powerless through sleep of soul. If my conscience is asleep, if my love is asleep, if my godly fear is asleep, I fall an easy prey.

I cannot but remember, as I read the story of the garden, that the disciples who failed so utterly there had just risen from the first Communion-table in the quiet upper room. The voice of the Master there must have been still ringing in their ears—not only His voice of love, but also His voice of warning—"All ye shall be offended because of Me *this night*." And yet, if I condemn them, let me think how often I have risen from *my* communion-fellowship with Him and almost immediately have been overpowered with the sleep of unwatchful-

ness ; how often I have fallen from my high estate, just after drinking in afresh the sweet assurances of His love, and pledging myself afresh to be true to Him. How disastrous such sleep has always been to me ! Its first effect was to make me an easy prey to the new temptations that assailed me ; and its next effect was to make me doubt the reality of that communion with Christ which at the time I thought so genuine and so precious to my heart. For the same tempter who tells me one day that I need not be so very sensitive and watchful now, because I am secure in my Redeemer's love, will tell me next day, after I have fallen, that I never belonged to Christ at all, and that my supposed communion with Him was all a delusion, else I would not have fallen again so soon. A tempter first, he will be an accuser next, and will echo *in scorn* what Jesus said *in sorrow*, " Could you not watch one hour ? "

And now let me consider that I must do for *my brethren* what the Lord asked these disciples to do for *Him*. I must guard them from danger. I must give them warning of the coming of the foe. I must also soothe them by my kindly sympathy. But I cannot do this *if I am asleep myself*. I am to be " my brother's keeper " if I cannot be my Lord's. The guardianship of every brother's safety is laid upon me as a sacred charge. If I cannot now serve my Master Himself, I can serve Him *in His brethren*. Even to go and sit beside a

suffering or a tempted brother, and help him by my sympathy, if I can do no more, is a sacred duty, and it ought to be to me a sacred joy. Sadly I have to reproach myself for failure even in this. My compassionate Master may excuse my sleep, but I cannot excuse myself; for this privilege of watching beside my brethren I often lose because I am too self-indulgent to trouble myself to do it. Let me think more of the joy that *may* be mine if faithful—the joy of hearing the Great Master one day say to me, “Inasmuch as thou didst it to one of the least of My brethren, thou didst it unto Me.”

XLIII

A TRAITOR'S KISS

“ Friend, wherefore art thou come ? ”—MATTHEW xxvi. 50.

“ Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss ? ”—LUKE xxii. 48.

THIS was Christ's last effort to win the soul of Judas, and save him from himself. The tone of His questions to the traitor was not a tone of indignation at the foul affront, so much as a tone of sadness over one for whom He had already done so much, and all in vain. For three whole years the gracious Lord had been striving with Satan for the possession of this poor soul ; but all to no purpose. It would not be won. Judas had long before come to an understanding with the devil ; and it was in the upper room that the final bargain was struck. Judas really committed suicide in that upper room ; though none but Jesus knew the dark tragedy that was being enacted there. There it was, in that sacred place, that he conclusively shut his heart against the Christ who would have

saved him, and opened it wide for the devil to come in, for it was there that he finally surrendered his *will* to the great deceiver; and whosoever absolutely *determines* upon a sin has really done it, whether he puts his hand to it or not. In the lives of most men there comes some decisive moment when both God and Satan seem to be awaiting the choice to be made, *both* of them saying "that thou doest do quickly"; and that single decision, that absolute surrender of the will, may settle the soul's destiny not for time only, but for eternity as well.

It is affecting to recall how much the Lord had done to touch the conscience and win the heart of this man, all in vain. Many of His most penetrating words must have been meant specially for Judas; such as His warnings against "covetousness," His making "the deceitfulness of riches" one of the things that choke the good seed, His saying "How hardly shall they that trust in riches enter into the Kingdom of God," His constant denunciations of "hypocrisy," His doom pronounced on Capernaum, "exalted to heaven, cast down to hell," His pungent question, "If ye have been unfaithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to you the true riches?" His solemn forewarning, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed; good were it for that man if he had never been born." It is difficult to believe that Judas had not sometimes a twinge of

conscience as he listened to words like these. But he silenced their voice within him, and steeled his worldly heart, till he "*sold himself* to work iniquity," even before he *sold his Master*.

It seems to me a most significant fact that Judas never called Jesus "*Lord*" as the other disciples did. When they said, "*Lord*, is it I?" he said only, "*Master*, is it I?" or "*Teacher*, is it I?" "No man calleth Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost"; and Judas had banished the Holy Spirit from his soul. So, too, it seems very significant that when Jesus said, "*Friend*, wherefore art thou come?" He used a word that had no note of *affection* in it. When He said to the rest, "I have called you *friends*," He used a word of *real affection*; and when He said, "*our friend* Lazarus sleepeth," He used a word which meant, "our dear one"; but when He spoke to Judas he used quite another word, one that meant only "comrade," or "companion." Yet even that word, recalling as it did the close intimacy of past years, might have touched any heart that had not passed the possibility of softening; and when the mournful question followed, "Judas, betrayest *thou* the Son of man *with a kiss*?" that was an appeal which only a thoroughly hardened heart could possibly have withstood. I see now what the Lord meant by saying, "one of you is a *devil*"; for none other could have done a deed so vile.

What marvellous long-suffering and meekness

the ill-treated Master showed in *submitting to that kiss* ! and submitting to it without the least trace of indignation at the insult ! Any other would have turned away his face, that it might not be polluted with such a kiss ; but this Divine sufferer could meekly stoop to endure even so base a thing as that, and feel only pity for the poor soul that was finding death upon His lips. The severest thing He said to the traitor was only a reminder of the long years of grace he had abused, and all the saving love that had been lavished on him, only to be trampled under foot. And yet how solemn that expostulation was ! To betray Him *after* a kiss would have been bad enough ; but to betray Him *by* a kiss was infinitely worse.

As I listen to my Master's last words to this poor, infatuated soul, many serious thoughts may be awakened in my own heart. They suggest to me how often, even still, the Son of man is "betrayed with a *kiss*." When I hear a rejection of His true Divinity covered by warm acknowledgments of the beauty of His humanity ; when I see the enemies of His *Godhead* still admiring the *man* ; when I listen to the deniers of His Divine glory lavishing encomiums on the graciousness of His life, or speaking of the nobility of His self-sacrifice as a martyr for truth, while scorning the idea of His death being a real atonement for sin ; I am forced to call all this by its only right name, a "betraying of the Son of man with a kiss." For

many a rejector of Christ can be wonderfully complimentary all the time. The sword with which he fights against Him may be adorned with gems and inlaid with gold ; but that does not make its thrust any the less a sin. He may be rejected with the most polished grace of phrase, as well as with a coarse and vulgar sneer, but the rejection is the same. It makes no difference to the guilt of a man, whether he casts God's laws behind him with a curse, or with the most courteous apologies for not obeying them ; and men who begin with the coldly courteous rejection, often end with the coarsest blasphemies. For all evil grows ; and it may sometimes grow so portentously that the heart will come to say, as Judas really did, " Evil, be thou my good."

I see, too, here, how sins of various kinds are closely linked together, one drawing many others after it. It is possible to speak of a man as " a man of one book," or " a man of one ambition " ; but no one can be called " a man of one sin." If he has one, he has more. The verdict of the unseeing world upon a man who has " gone wrong " sometimes is " that is his *one* fault," " that is his *one* bad habit." It is never so. If he has one bad habit open enough to meet the eye he is sure to have many others that lie out of sight. I never yet came upon a piece of waste ground that had only one weed growing on it. If there are weeds at all, I am sure to find them of

many sorts, though some of the smaller may be hidden by those of larger growth. So I see that the covetousness of Judas was linked to worldly ambition; that worldly ambition was linked to deep hypocrisy; that hypocrisy led on to revengeful hate; that revenge led on to treason; and that treason led to suicide at the end. Let me beware of the small sins that lead on to greater ones, of the *secret* sins that lead to *open* ones, of the *heart-defilement* which will soon be *life-defilement* too.

One other thought arises now. Supposing that this last attempt of the Lord's to win Judas had succeeded, and the betrayer, stricken with remorse, had fallen at his Master's feet and sought forgiveness even at that eleventh hour, would not He who pardoned the thief of the cross have pardoned the thief of the garden, too? Would not Gethsemane have had its miracle of grace as well as Calvary? Had sinning Judas wept like sinning Peter, he need not have gone away and hanged himself in dark despair, for the very Christ he so sinned against would have shown that He could "abundantly pardon" the very worst, and save even one who was but a few yards from the mouth of hell. But what awful memories that poor lost soul must have carried with it into the eternal world! memories not only of all that it had done against the Lord, but of all that the Lord had done to save it, and done in vain! It is hard to say which will be the bitterest thought to the lost

beyond the grave—the threatenings that *have been* fulfilled, or the promises that *might have been* fulfilled, if only they had listened to love's pleading voice. For, every one who is shut out of heaven is shut out by his own act alone, and will stand outside the gate, not only *self-destroyed*, but *self-condemned*; and no more bitter thought will any man have then than this, “through all my life below, my God was seeking to draw me to heaven, throwing round me the cords of a most wonderful and patient love; and yet I broke these cords one by one and cast them all away, and up to the very last was resisting, not the anger, not the rebukes, but the mercifulness, the grace, the love of Him who can now say only this, *I would have healed thee and thou wouldst not be healed.*”

XLIV

HIMSELF HE WOULD NOT SAVE

“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”—
MATTHEW xxvi. 53, 54.

MOST wonderfully here does the Lord's complete submission and self-control stand out against the impulsiveness of His rash, though loving, disciple. Peter condensed into one furious blow the impatience that had long been manifested in reckless words. His Master, though knowing that the infinite resources of heaven were at His call, would not avail Himself of them even in that hour of bitterest humiliation. The traitor's kiss had been given. The Divine Lord was at last seized by sinful hands and bound. Yet, even then, He would not use His Divine power to free Himself from the cords that He might heal the severed ear. He only turned to the soldiers and said, “Suffer ye

thus far"; "let My hand be for one moment free, that I may do one more act of mercy yet."

Peter knew nothing of his Master's infinite resources. That keen but delicate spiritual vision which can enable its possessor to "endure as seeing Him who is invisible," was wanting altogether to Peter yet; and he had not yet, for all the Master's iteration of it, understood the truth that "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." But the Master Himself had been *living in the invisible all along*; and even in this dark hour He felt how near Him God's invisible host of angels was. "More than twelve legions of angels," He said, "would appear immediately at My call, one defending legion for each of you eleven, and one for Me; and other attacking legions for smiting down the foe. Both you and I would be surrounded by a force against which all earthly forces would break in absolute dismay. I have but to pray My Father, and this dark garden of Gethsemane would be as full of shining ones as the streets of the New Jerusalem itself."

I read this story and a new feeling comes to me of the wonder of that self-abjuring love that took my Redeemer willingly to the cross. I see the deep meaning of His words, "No man taketh My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." The cross of Calvary, not a flaming escort of angels, was the way home which the Father had appointed for

Him ; and tread that dolorous way He would. A single prayer would have saved Him from the shame, but He had said before, "He that loveth his life shall lose it ;" and so that prayer He would not suffer to pass His lips. It was not even in His heart. The task which He had accepted in His glory, and for which He had left the glory, was to conquer sin by calmly submitting to bear the penalty of sin. He never was, and could not be, the "victim of circumstances." At any moment He could have proved that He was above all circumstances and all the powers of evil. But that would have defeated His purpose ; and therefore not one hair's-breadth would He go out of the road appointed by the Father's will with His own consent. A mere martyr, overpowered by circumstances, He could not be. In its willingness of self-surrender lay all the virtue of His life. In the glimpse He gives me here of the angelic hosts that could have freed Him in a moment from pain, and shame, and death, I see how absolutely perfect His self-renunciation was.

In any crisis of my life, too, I can pray the Father ; but there are many times when I will not ask *release* from suffering, but only power to suffer uncomplainingly and trustfully as well. My Lord Himself once said—I would seek grace to say it after Him—"Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, *save me from* this hour? (No, I will not say that, but,) Father, *glorify Thy*

Name." It may be that, in like circumstances, to me also there may come a voice from heaven saying, "I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

My Lord did not pray for release from pain ; but *He did pray*. Even then He was gaining strength through prayer. And He did not say to Peter, "I can pray to *God*." That would have been more like one who was thinking only of a mighty Potentate in heaven. He said, "I can pray to *My Father*" ; for that had in it the element of perfect trustfulness and rest. To say in my troubles, "this is the *will of God*," is true, but cold. To say, "this is *my Father's will*," lets me feel the warm embrace of a Father's arms, and see a smile upon a Father's face.

Let this be my grand resource in difficulty of every kind ; for, though my Master's life lay upon a plane infinitely *higher* than mine, that is no reason why my feelings should not be *parallel with His*, however far below. Persecuted, I can pray. Misconstrued and slandered, I can pray. In danger I can pray. In the death chamber I can pray. By the grave of my loved ones I can pray. I can never be anywhere that prayer will not sustain me, if it does not extricate me. Indeed, I will not ask extrication ; I will only ask submissive trust.

There may be more than one Gethsemane in my life ; how shall I meet them ? I cannot ask or

expect deliverance by supernatural means ; no host of angels will come at *my* command. I might gain deliverance if I simply gave up the conflict in despair ; but that would not be victory, it would be only everlasting loss. I will take rather my Master's way. I will *pray myself into peace* ; and then the victory will be sure.

Now let me think of the reason given by my Lord for not offering that prayer, "How, then, shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" What profound obedience to the *Word* of the Father as well as to the *will* of the Father was there ! It was written in the Scriptures, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, against the man that is my Fellow, saith the Lord of hosts ; smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." The fulfilment of that Scripture fell due that night in the garden, and the Shepherd was ready to be smitten to death, rather than that the word of the Father should be falsified. "To redeem the world by dying for it," He said, "is the way appointed for Me ; who else *can* redeem it if I draw back?" Peter little thought when he drew his sword to prevent his Master suffering, that he was fighting to prevent the redemption of the world ! Well, if I fight foolishly to prevent my own sufferings, I may, perhaps, unconsciously, be hindering the coming of untold blessings to myself, and to others besides.

Let it draw me more to the Scriptures which

Christ so thoroughly understood, so greatly honoured, so passionately loved, to see how, all His life through, they were His inspiration to duty, His comfort in sadness, His encouragement in trial. No one ever needed the Scriptures less ; but no one ever prized them more. They were the very food of His soul ; they were also the weapon by which He “overcame the wicked one.” In the Scriptures He found a picture of Himself, and He set Himself to the work of fulfilling that picture, and presenting it in His own living form to men. All that the Scripture declared He would be, He was ; all that the Scripture said He would do for the Father, He did ; just as all that the Scripture said the Father would do for Him, the Father did. His whole life was one long dependence on the Father’s words—His commanding words and His promising words alike. The very words of the Book were dear to His heart. By the very words of it He conquered the Tempter thrice. By the words of the Book He confuted His foes. He showed them their ignorance of the Book, and made them see truths lying in it that they had never seen before. In the very words of this Book He poured out His cry of forsakenness upon the cross. In the very words of it He commended His soul into His Father’s hands.

Let me, too, live upon the Scriptures ; they will be my most nourishing food. Let me, too, find in the

Scriptures a picture of myself, of what I am by nature, of what I am by grace, of what I ought to be as a redeemed child of God; and a picture of all that I must willingly endure in order to be "perfected" as my Master was. Then I will not murmur at the discipline I must pass through. When trials come, and sorrows darken down, I will remember how *it is written* that "through much tribulation I must enter the kingdom"; and over against my sometimes weary longings for speedy relief, I will lay these words of my patient Master, "But how, then, shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?"

XLV

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

“The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?”
—JOHN xviii. 11.

To how many thousands of suffering hearts has this question of the suffering Master's come as heavenly balm! If *He*, the sinless One, could say that, and with reference to such awful soul-agony as His, how much more may I say it, when any less affliction comes to me! There was here not so much a cry of pain as a shout of victory. Gradually, as the fierce struggle went on, the Lord was *gaining* strength, not losing it. His first feeling was not so calm, or so victorious as His last. At first He had been able only to say, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” Soon, however, having got from the Father some intimation that it was *not* possible, He changed that prayer for a higher one, “If this cup may not pass except I drink it, Thy will be done”; till finally

He could rise higher still, "The cup which My Father giveth Me, shall I not drink it?" First, it looked only a cup from the cruel hands of men, but soon a cup *given Him by the hand of the Father*. There was first, the "strong crying and tears to Him that was able to save Him from death"; then the "learning of obedience by the things which He suffered"; and then the victory and perfect peace.

Shall I ever, on this side heaven, be able to fathom the mystery of this great Gethsemane struggle? or the mystery of the help that came to Him, when "there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening Him"? "*Strengthening*," but how? What could any angel do, or say, to Him who was the Lord of all angels still? Only one thing is completely clear, that His victory was the victory of *faith*, and was gained by agonizing *prayer*. But if so, what potent weapons these must be, that could make even Christ stronger than He was! What momentous necessities for my own Christian life must these be, that even Christ could not do without!

The dominant note of this prayer for Himself was "Father," the same that sounds so clearly in the model prayer He taught His disciples to use. So, then, the God that, in Gethsemane, was smiting the faithful shepherd and not the guilty sheep, was a "Father" still; and this prayer, like the other, I can use when any darkness falls over me,

which I cannot pierce. Any suffering that comes to me must be entirely different from *His* sufferings in this respect, that mine are all deserved, for I am a sinner. *My* cup must often be a cup of real *chastisement*, as Christ's was not; and yet, even so, I can accept and drink it uncomplainingly, since it is brought to me by a "Father's" hand.

I may not be able to connect my suffering with any particular sin for which it is a chastisement, (though sometimes I can), but a real trust in my Father is quite independent of my ability to see any reason for His dealings with me. I trust Him, not because I know His meaning, but because I know *Himself*. I may say of some men that I know them too well to trust them; but God is always trusted in proportion as He is known. Those who have known Him longest trust Him most. "Do you see any special reason for this sore trial?" was the question once put to a very afflicted man; and the answer came immediately, "No, but I am as well satisfied as if I saw a thousand; for my Father's will is *the perfection of reasons*." The one thought, "It is my Father who is giving me this cup to drink," stills every murmur in heart or lip. As I take it from His hands, I can hear Him say, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter"; and that "hereafter" may be not only the hereafter of eternity, but a hereafter in time. My own

future life on earth may explain the present pain, when I find how rich a blessing the cup has brought. "Afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness"; but God's "afterward" is not necessarily the afterward of heaven; it may be an afterward on earth, long before heaven comes.

Samson's friends quarrelled with him because they could not understand his riddle, "Out of the eater comes forth meat." Many of God's friends are apt to quarrel with Him for the same reason. But the explanation of the riddle will not be long deferred, if faith *accepts* the sorrow which it does not *comprehend*. "I have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord" in afflicting *him*. It was a very bitter cup he was made to drink, and the reason for having to drink it he could not understand. He said, "I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet, *yet* trouble came." It was as much as to say, "If I had been flattering myself that no evil could touch me, it would not have surprised me that such calamities should come to rebuke my pride; if I had been 'settled on my lees,' it would not have seemed strange that I should be 'emptied from vessel to vessel'; if I had been saying 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for thee for many years, take thine ease,' it would not have been wonderful that God should show me my folly by blows like these; but I was not secure, and proud of my security, and *yet* trouble came." It was all a mystery

to him. "Why should God thus set me as a mark for all His arrows? Why should all these sorrows meet on me?" And yet, in that darkest hour, surveying his desolated home, and not knowing but farther suffering might be near, his faith could say, "Let God send me even bitterer griefs, I will not complain; *though He slay me outright*, I will trust in Him." That was *his* willingness to drink the cup which a Father gave him; and soon he saw "the end of the Lord," for "the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before."

I will take any cup of bitterness that is prepared by my Father's hand, not only because it is my Father's will that I should drink it, but because I know what it will bring me "afterwards." Eliphaz the Temanite was right, "Happy is the man whom God *correcteth*." All God's chastenings are meant to be *corrections*; meant to put things right within me, to cure, to heal. Even God Himself cannot put into me the fulness of His blessing, till He has first *emptied my heart to receive it*; and sometimes He cannot empty the *heart* till He has first emptied the *life*. But He will kill nothing in me that is not better dead. He will make no wounds except such as are sure to lead to stronger health. It is in this way that "He healeth my diseases, and doth my soul redeem."

Every heart has "its own plague"; every soul has its own "disease": and the Great Physician mingles the ingredients of every cup in exactest

adaptation to each patient's need; whether it be that pride is uplifting the soul, or vanity inflating it, or covetousness weakening it, or some vice enslaving it, or worldliness filling it. I may well let Him take His own way of removing these things that both hinder my usefulness and destroy my peace. When the cup is put into my hands, I may well ask myself, "Is there some sin in me, undiscovered yet, which my Father means thus to cure? Are there some desires of the flesh or of the mind remaining still unsanctified, which this bitter medicine is meant to heal? I would fain be healed at any cost; and if this is the way in which healing is to come, I will bless the hand that puts the cup to my lips."

Would any man seriously complain, if, after a storm has destroyed his crops, he should go forth into his field to see the devastation, and find that what he thought a storm of hail was really a shower of precious stones, and pearls, and gold, leaving him a richer man by far than he ever expected to be? But this is what my Lord's chastenings often are. They leave behind them a richer blessing than they took away. I may often lose deep joys by being afraid of deep sorrows.

Let me learn from my sinless Master, how to accept the bitter cup, which, if in any sense, and for any end, *needed by Him*, is a thousand times more *needed by me*. Let me echo the words of one who suffered much: "When the flail of

affliction smites me, I would not be as the chaff that flies in the smiter's face, but as the corn that lies at his feet."

"Pain's furnace-heat within me quivers;
God's breath upon the flame doth blow:
And all my heart in anguish shivers,
And trembles at the fiery glow;
And yet I whisper '*As God will*,
And in His hottest fire am still.

Why should I murmur? for the sorrow
Thus only longer-lived would be;
Its end *will* come; and *may* to-morrow,
When God has done His work in me.
So I say trusting, '*As God will*,
And, trusting to the end, am still."

XLVI

TEARS WIPED AWAY

“Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?”—JOHN xx. 15.

MARY MAGDALENE was the first of all the disciples to visit the tomb where her loved Master had been laid. None loved Him more; none could less bear the thought that she should not see Him again. She stood outside, in the dark before the dawn, and wept. She *wept* because the grave was empty, but she soon learned to *rejoice because it was empty*, for her Lord was standing at her side, “risen, as He had said.”

Meanwhile that tomb was not quite so empty as she thought. Two angels were there, where the body of their Lord had lain—two of that unseen band of heavenly witnesses that were always close beside Him, but showed themselves for a moment or two, only at each great crisis in His life—at His birth, at His temptation, at His wrestling in Gethsemane, at His resurrection from the grave,

and at His ascension into glory. But she hardly thought of *them*, though she conversed with them as naturally as if a talk with angels had been one of the commonest occurrences in her life. She hardly thought of them, or why they should be there. Her whole heart was busy about one thing only—the finding of her Lord; and that one absorbing purpose blinded her to everything that otherwise would have seemed unusual. But that Lord was nearer than she knew, and His question as the Risen One, though exactly the same in words as the question of the angels had been, was far more tender in tone: “Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?”

These are the first recorded words of Jesus to any disciple after He had risen from the tomb; and they suggest to me the infinite tenderness of His compassionate heart. If it seems strange that Mary did not at once recognise her Lord, but “supposed Him to be the gardener” of the place, I must remember that it was still only the grey dawn, in which everything is indistinct, and that it was not the old form or the old features or the old expression of her Master that she saw. They were the form and the face of the “*glorified Jesus*,” not those that had belonged to His humiliation life, and which she had so often studied closely, and remembered well. The face that had been deeply marked with lines of suffering, the face that of itself proclaimed Him to be a man “acquainted

with grief," the prematurely-aged face that made the Jews mistake Him for a man about fifty years of age—that face, and all else pertaining to His low estate, He had now left behind Him for ever. When He rose from the dead all trace of the long curse He had been bearing as He was "taking away the sin of the world" had vanished utterly; and though there was still enough to prove Him to be "that same Jesus," there was so great a difference, too, that *many* who had known Him once, failed to recognise Him afterwards. The two disciples on the Emmaus road thought Him only some passing "stranger"; and when above five hundred brethren met Him by appointment on a mountain in Galilee, most of them "worshipped," but "*some doubted.*" No wonder, therefore, that even Mary did not immediately recognise Him in the garden. Even His question did not reveal Him. "Supposing Him to be the gardener," she seemed to think, "here is *another* asking me that same question, 'Why weepest thou?' How do they all not know that I cannot but weep when my loss has been so great?" It needed the Master's "calling her by name" to make her sure that it was really He. But there was a very deep sympathy on His side, meeting that deep love on hers; and I see this, in the fact that His *first* greeting in His risen life should have been to *her* rather than to any else.

Indeed, the *order* in which He manifested Him-

self to the different disciples is one of the most beautiful illustrations of His tender thoughtfulness to be met with anywhere. Reasoning on the matter beforehand, I should certainly have concluded that His specially commissioned apostles would have been the first to be greeted by the Risen Lord. But it was not so. Not to them, nor to any of their sex, did He first appear. It was to a woman, the weeping Mary, who was probably the most broken-hearted of all the little band. Well, surely He will appear to the apostles *next*? No; not yet—only to one of them, and that one, not John who loved Him most, and alone had the courage to stand beside Him at the cross, but *Peter*, the disciple that had grieved Him most, who had denied Him shamefully, but who had been weeping hot tears of penitence ever since. Now, then, surely the turn of the rest will come? No; there are other bruised hearts that must get healing first—two sad and weary men that were going away home like stricken deer to die alone, saying, “We trusted it had been He who should have redeemed Israel.” The other disciples had *some* comfort from the angels’ words; these had none; and not till these most disconsolate ones had been made to sing for joy, did He turn to the ten who were gathered trembling in the upper room, and show Himself to them as the Living One who had conquered death. It was all so like Himself to go first with eager love to the souls

that needed Him most. I see, therefore, that the more sorely *I* need Him, the sooner He will come to *me*. "He will not break the bruised reed," and He will not let any other hand break it either. If I am lying bruised and wholly unable to bring my own strength back, He will gently lift me and tenderly nourish me till I am strong once more; and the poor reed that He has saved from breaking will then once more, in the blessed sunshine, show forth His power.

The question of Jesus to Mary *implied* that her weeping was due to her *ignorance of a blessed fact that would have made it useless*; and my weeping at the grave of lost joys, or lost hopes, or lost ambitions may often be the same ignorant and useless thing. God has always much better things in store for me than those which I have lost, and if I only knew all that He does of the case, I might find that I have been weeping over loss, where I ought rather to have been giving thanks. I am often weeping over losses that turn out to have been no losses at all. The tears that fall at the grave of my affections, or at the grave of my ambitions, may often be, like Mary's, only tears of ignorance; and I may soon discover that "God, having provided some better thing for me," gives me what not merely compensates for the loss, but goes infinitely beyond it, too. If I were to erect a tombstone over each of the things I have mourned losing in my blind and foolish grief, I would soon

be unable to read the inscriptions I engraved upon them, for very shame !

The question "Why weepest thou?" may also come to me as a corrective of the often-recurring but vain wish that I had seen and known my Lord in His earthly life, as the first disciples did. I am conscious sometimes of a regretful feeling as to this. It seems difficult sometimes to *realise* my Christ. I speak of Him to others; I speak to Him in prayer; and yet all the time I can hardly help wishing that I could picture Him to myself as a Christ whom I had *actually seen*. It is a disappointment to me, and seems a loss, that I can know Him only by *faith*. To have "seen the Lord" I often think must have been a supreme privilege from which I am debarred. To have gazed upon His face till every feature was stamped indelibly on my memory; to have listened to His human voice so that I could recall every varying tone; to have as clear a conception of His person as I have of some dear absent friend—this, I sometimes think, would have been a privilege beyond all others, for my heart. And then I think how easy it must have been for a trembling penitent to fall at His feet and be assured of His forgiveness, if an actual human voice said, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee;" how great would have been the comfort of feeling that there was no room for doubt, of being able to say, "It is *Himself* that speaks, and He speaks to *me*:"

whereas now He appears to me a Saviour vague, shadowy, and dim.

Yet this would be only repeating Mary's mistake. Better far, after all, for me, that I know Him only as the exalted Christ, no longer a poor man of sorrows, but the Lord of glory, a Saviour who can be *every moment* at my side—nay, a Saviour who abides within me, a Master who teaches me every day, a Lord whose resurrection life becomes my very own, a Redeemer who is really far more intimate with me than He was with any who knew Him in His life below, and more tender, more sympathising, more *able* to help than the dearest earthly friend ever was or ever could be. I can say as I *look up to Him* what I could not have said as I *looked round about for Him*, “Whom, *having not seen*, I love; in whom, though now I see Him not, yet believing, I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

XLVII

AN EVENING WALK

‘ What manner of communications are these that ye have one with another, as ye walk, and are sad ? ’—LUKE xxiv. 17.

THE exquisite story of the evening walk to Emmaus is one of which no Christian heart can ever tire. It is one of the most beautiful and graphic stories which the gospels contain. Some one has likened it to the tender after-glow sometimes to be witnessed when the sun has set ; but I would rather think of it as the early freshness of the morning when the sun has newly risen, and the earth is still bathed in its dew-tears which in a few moments more will pass completely away. Possibly the feeling both of evening and of morning may be in it, for though to the sad-hearted disciples it seemed as if the sun of their hope had set for ever, it was, unknown to them, the Lord’s resurrection day ; and as from Him the gloom had already disappeared, so from them, when His risen

glory broke upon their sight, the gloom would disappear for ever, too.

I can easily understand how Cleopas and his companion should be so sad, and also how they should wonder at the stranger's ignorance of what was making them sad. They were walking mournfully homeward, under the shadow of a greatly perplexing mystery, with only a very faint gleam of hope breaking through the cloud of their despair; and, heart-broken as they were, they almost resented what seemed to be a stranger's ignorant indifference. I know the feeling. When some great sorrow has crushed me into the dust, I am so absorbed with the keenness of my loss, that I cannot conceive how all beside me do not feel the grief acutely too. I would rather they did not speak to me at all, than coldly ask me what I am sorrowing for. But I think I understand my Master's feelings too, and see that, though He knew well the secret of their sadness, He wanted them to tell it out, that He might lift it off for ever, in the one blessed moment when He revealed *Himself*.

A solemn, heart-searching question suggests itself here. Would I like my Lord and Master to overhear *all* my conversations with the friends who go beside me on life's way? If He were to break in suddenly on some of my talks, and say "What manner of communications are these that ye have one with another?" how ashamed before Him I

would sometimes feel! And yet, He is always a listener to my speech. Dare I allow myself, in even an intimate conversation, to utter anything—any bitter word, any untruthful slander, any ungenerous insinuation, any unseemly jest, any impure remark—which it would cover me with confusion to think He has overheard? Must I not set a watch, every hour, upon my lips, because the Holy Christ is so close beside me, listening to all I say?

Yet, as it was in the character, not of a reproving, but of a sympathising, friend that He spoke to these disciples, let me think of Him as ready to sympathise with and comfort me, when I walk sad. It often does my sore heart no good to tell its sorrow to any earthly friend. To talk over all the incidents, all the hopes, all the disappointments, all the discouragements, all the "*might-have-beens*" connected with it, only deepens the gloom. I need a *wiser* friend than any just like myself can be, a friend who understands what perplexes me, a friend who Himself sees and can show to me "the bright light that is within the cloud," a friend who has not merely the love to sympathise with me, but the *power to help*. Just such a friend is this great Christ, who sometimes seems a stranger, but, coming to me and chasing my gloom away, reveals Himself as the very Lord who said "Ye shall weep and lament while the world rejoices, but I will see you again, and your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

He comes to me *unbidden*. It is just His love to me that brings Him to my side. He comes *unrecognised* at first ; for to me, as to these sorrowing ones, He wears "another form" than that in which I had known Him before. My eyes, like theirs, are sealed with grief, are so "holden" that I cannot know Him in that new form to be the same as ever. He walks beside me, and talks with me, and makes "my heart burn within me ;" and yet, for a time, there is no "lifting up," till, in a moment, somehow, the scales fall from my eyes ; I know Him ; and ere He goes, He leaves with me His own deep, wonderful, satisfying, and unlosable peace.

It may help me in my sorrows to think of that Emmaus-road in the falling shadows, with two gloom-covered men walking sadly on, and the unknown Jesus for a third. When my heart is crushed by some sore blow, I am apt to think no one ever went along so dreary a path before. But I see footmarks in it, which tell me that many another wayfarer has been already there. I see the path strangely blessed with a companionship that wonderfully soothes me, and I see that I will not want, for long, some thrilling word that will change my grief into a song. When I look at the thick dust of that Emmaus-road, I seem to see "treasures hid in the sand," for it tells me what riches of comfort lie waiting for me in my dreariest paths, what unexpected joys may be only a very

little way ahead, and how soon the dirge I am wailing out in a sad minor key may be exchanged for a burst of praise. I have heard that caged canaries learn their sweetest notes *in the dark*. I am sure many of my darkest hours have been the birth-place of my highest songs. It was often just when the water in my bottle was completely spent, and, Hagar-like, I felt that I could only lay myself down to die, that my eyes were opened to see the flowing spring that had been close beside me all the time, although I knew it not. When I go mourning without the sun, a few words from the Risen Lord can easily put everything right ; but I often need the darkness in order to appreciate the light.

How like the Master it was, to go after these two sorrowing ones on the very day of His triumphant resurrection ! He thought it worth while to walk seven miles, and spend two hours in the work of comforting two obscure, lowly, dejected disciples. The tenderness of His love comes out in that. But it seems to me a most significant fact that the Lord, after His resurrection, *spoke only to disciples*. He had nothing more to say to the world. He had said to it all that He was sent to say, and done for it all that He was sent to do. His work for *it* was finished, but not His work for His own disciples. When His great work of *testimony and of suffering* was over, His tender work of *comforting* still went on.

And He seems never to have spoken, as the Risen One, to any but *sorrowing* disciples. To Mary and the other women weeping at the tomb; to Peter overcome with self-reproach; to those two going to Emmaus; to the ten shut closely in the upper room in fear; to Thomas, sad because he wanted to believe and could not; to the nine at the lake-side, dispirited with a night of fruitless toil, still more dispirited because their Master had not come to them, as He said He would; to the five hundred in Galilee, and to the eleven on Olivet, all of them sad because it was a scene of leave-taking, the parting with One whom they would see on earth no more. Every recorded word of the Risen Lord was a word to the sad, whether their sadness arose from sin, or trial, or disappointment, or unbelief, or fear. And He spoke *only comfort*: nothing else. Never a word about their sin; never a word of reproof; only words of good cheer, unfolding His own glory, and their glory in following Him. Living Himself in the joy of victory, He only wished them to be sharers in that joy.

This tender Christ is with me now. Many a surprise visit *I* have had from Him already, and they are only foreshadowings of the still greater surprise He is preparing for me when He shall come to disappear no more, when my eyes shall no longer be "holden that I cannot know Him," but I shall "see Him *as He is*." What a vision *that*

will be—not to see Him as He *was*, weary, worn, shamed, rejected of men, acquainted with grief, but to see Him as John in Patmos saw Him, the crowned King of heaven; and to see that the Christ upon the throne is just the same as the Christ of my faith, the Christ of my prayers, the Christ of my communions here; to see that the hand that holds the seven stars is just the hand that was laid in blessing on the heads of little children; that the face shining above the brightness of the sun is just the face that drew sinners to His feet; that the breast girt with the golden girdle is just the same as that on which John leaned his happy head; to see that His glory has made no change in His heart—that is the vision reserved for me when my journey along the dusty highway is at an end, and I reach the home from which He will “vanish” no more. Keep me, O Saviour, till I see Thee there!

XLVIII

OPENED EYES

“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?”—LUKE xxiv. 25, 26.

I AM ready enough to echo my Lord's rebuke of these two disciples. Certainly they *ought* to have better understood the Scriptures, for these Scriptures spoke clearly enough. There was a culpable ignorance in these men, a blindness of heart that He could not excuse. But am I so different from them myself? Do I myself not often fail to see truth that is clear, fail to grasp the promises and rest believingly in them? Do I myself always see that “suffering” is the way to “glory”—the only way? Why do *I* doubt and despair, when things fall out to me exactly as my God has, a thousand times over, told me they must?

The Lord spoke to these disciples of a *necessity* for His sufferings; and that necessity was two-fold. There was a necessity that the Scriptures should

be fulfilled; but there was also a necessity in the very nature of the case. The whole teaching of the Scriptures, from first to last, had been that the Christ should be a suffering, before He was a reigning, Christ. The prophets, with one voice, had spoken of "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should *follow*." Sometimes the picture of the Sufferer was clearer than the picture of the Conqueror. Sometimes, again, it was the glory that was largest to the eye. But both were there; and only ignorance of the Scriptures could have hid them from view. Jesus knew the Scriptures as none else had ever done. The Word of God had all along been the very life of His soul. His one answer, to caviller and tempter alike, had been "It is written"; and here, in talking to these two, *His testimony to the Scriptures* was, that the Scriptures had been only *one long testimony to Him*; for He found, and brought out to view, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning *Himself*!

How strange it must have been for Christ to read this book, finding absolutely nothing in Himself of the sins which it rebuked, but finding everywhere glimpses and hopes and predictions of the coming one who was *Himself*! As He read the sacred page, the world of all time lay before His eye, like a lost and helpless man gazing with upturned face to the sky, looking for the advent of some great Deliverer, a Redeemer who would conquer sin by

“bearing” it, who would vanquish death by passing through it, who would suffer to the uttermost that He might save to the uttermost, and then would reign in the glory which His obedience unto death had won; and, all along, He could say, as He read, “This Scripture is to be fulfilled *in Me*.”

I would learn from my Master to reverence more deeply, and to ponder more believingly, this divine Word of God, in which I can see not only things concerning *Him*, but things concerning *myself* as well. I need to watch lest, in a busy age, the Scripture should cease to be the constant nourishment of my higher life; lest I hurry off to my business in the morning, too pressed for time to study it, and come in at night, too tired to do it; and lest all kinds of literature eagerly read should destroy my relish for it, and so my soul should starve, even with God’s rich bread within my reach. I need to remember that a careless reader of the Bible never becomes a close walker with God; and that if I read it seldom, I will soon not care to read it at all. It becomes distasteful only when little read. It grows in interest to the heart that loves it, and is always freshest to those that study it most deeply, and know it best; and that just because the Christ to whom it bears witness is an inexhaustible Christ, and the soul-experience which it describes is an inexhaustible theme. Hidden wonders start out perpetually to view, when I hear it speak of my own heart with its

longings and its sins, and when I hear it speak of Christ's heart, with His unfathomable grace. But, for this, I need always to offer the old prayer, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold the wonders of Thy law." If it ever seems dull and meaningless, it is only as the stained window of a cathedral looks dull and meaningless *to one who stands outside*. To see its beauty, I need to enter the sanctuary first, and then look at the window from the *inside*, to the light beyond. The splendour cannot be discerned till two requisites meet, a seeing eye, on the one hand, and a shining light on the other. Scripture becomes to me a glorious transparency, only when I hold the record up between my opened eye and the light that shines from heaven. But if my eyes *are* open, I will (as Bishop Watson said) see only two things in it from first to last, "a revelation of the gracious heart of God, and a revelation of the wicked heart of man;" and I shall see the God of the gracious heart reaching out His hand to the sinner of the wicked heart, and offering to give him life and peace and holiness through His Son.

Now, let me remind myself that the same Scriptures that showed my Lord and Master how needful it was that *His* path to glory should be one of suffering, show me that a share in that glory can come to *me* in no other way; that "through much tribulation I also must enter into the kingdom." The whole of the reasons for this I do not yet know;

but I see enough to show me at least the end which God has in view. It is only one of many mortifying proofs of what rebellious and intractable children of the heavenly Father the best of disciples are, that even He whose name is Love can find no other way of bringing them to a perfected immortality except a life-long discipline of sorrows and pains. Even my own experience has been enough to teach me that "suffering" is the school in which I learn the deepest secrets of my Saviour's love, the fire in which my heart-evil is most thoroughly purged away, the Gethsemane where, most of all, I discover the preciousness and the power of prayer.

By the discipline of suffering I learn better to understand my Lord; but by it, I learn also how to sympathise with other sufferers. Only one who can speak feelingly from his own experience is of much use as a comforter of the sad. There are some round about me in the world to-day, whom I could almost wish to see more afflicted than they ever yet have been; for then they would be more tender-spirited, less cold, less censorious, less hard, —and, to lose a good deal of their *hardness* would be a blessing not only to themselves but to many beside them whom their unfeelingness deeply wounds. That hardness can be taken out of men only by the furnace-heat. Sons of Thunder can be made anywhere. Barnabases, sons of Consolation, can be made only in the fire. The

keenest suffering, therefore, appointed to me, may be only my apprenticeship to the sacred office of being a comforter to some sad hearts beside me.

In this path of suffering, too, (and it will be good to remember this), I am only treading in the foot-prints of my Lord. He, also, was "made perfect through suffering." He gained thereby a greater sympathy with tried and sorrow-wounded men, and became thus a Saviour more perfectly equipped for His saving work. In some strange, mysterious way, even *He* "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." How that could be, I cannot know; but this I see, that if I am to be "conformed to His image" I must go through the fire; for though God *had one Son without sin*, He never yet had a Son *without suffering*. Indeed, chastening is part of the peculiar *heritage* of all sons and daughters of God. The great Husbandman does not prune the brambles outside His garden-wall, but He does the fruit trees within. Better far to be His wounded trees than the unwounded thorns of the wilderness. If what Israel's "sweet psalmist" said is true, "Blessed is he whose iniquity is forgiven," and if what he also says is true, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord," then the *pardoned* man who is *also a chastened* man is *doubly* blest.

I think Bunyan must have well understood this when he described the valley of humiliation as "the best and most fruitful piece of ground in all these

parts ; there, our Lord Himself had once His country house, and He loved much to be in it ; and though Christian had the hard hap to meet Apollyon there, yet I must tell you that in former times men met angels there, found pearls there, yea, met there with the Lord Himself, who has left a yearly revenue to be expended on all pilgrims for their maintenance while in it."

To suffer may be hard ; but to "suffer *with Him*" can never be hard : and, to be "glorified *together*"—who can tell the ineffable blessedness of that ! Very beautifully said Samuel Rutherford, writing to a much-tried friend, "Faint not, the miles to heaven are few and short. There are many heads lying on Christ's bosom, but *there is room for yours among the rest.*"

XLIX

CHRIST EVER THE SAME

“Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see. . . . And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish . . . and He took it, and did eat before them.”—LUKE xxiv. 38, 43.

So then, though now the Lord of Glory, their Master was showing Himself to be the same tender-hearted, loving Friend as ever. The gathered disciples were afraid of Him, as, indeed, they might well be, not knowing Him perfectly as yet; for they were not merely a *dispirited* company, having had no visit from Him as they had hoped, and a *trembling* company, fearing the vengeance of the crucifiers of their Master, but a *conscience-smitten* company too, deeply conscious of their sin in being ashamed of *Him*, and concluding that if He were really risen, as they had been told, He would now be ashamed of *them*.

How wonderful, then, it must have been to them, that as He mysteriously passed through the bolted door and stood in their midst, His very first word should be, "Peace be unto you!" Not a word of rebuke, not a word recalling the shameful past, not even any waiting till they had confessed their sin. The sin had already been put behind His back. He had nothing now but His love to speak to them about. The *God of peace* had brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep; and the first thing that Shepherd did was to comfort His little flock, saying, "*Peace* be unto you!"

He had not said "Peace be unto you!" to the *women* whom He met at the grave. *They* had not deserted Him, as the rest had done; and *they* did not need forgiveness for forsaking Him. But to those who did need it, and were fearing it would never come, He brought it as His first message, and brought it in the same old way, without anything to suggest how keenly He had felt their sin; speaking to them as if it never had been there, and then proceeding to remove all fear and doubt at once, by giving them, first the evidence of *hearing*, and then the evidence of *sight*, and then the evidence of *touch*, and next the evidence that came from seeing Him actually *eat and drink*, thus "by many infallible proofs" convincing them that He was really "that same Jesus" whom they had known and loved and followed in days gone by.

Let me be very still as I listen to the words that tell me that this Lord and Master is, to me also, the "same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." To rid me of all my misgivings, He tells me, first, that He is no longer a *dead*, but a *living*, Christ; and He tells me, next, that though He has "entered into His glory," He is "the same Jesus" as of old—the same in tenderness and the same in grace. I would be a brighter Christian than I am, if I thought of Him as the *living* Christ. I sing with joy—

"My faith looks up to Thee
Thou *Lamb of Calvary*";

but perhaps I think, not too *much*—I cannot do that—but too *exclusively* of the Christ that died, and not sufficiently of the Christ who lives and reigns, and is now my living Advocate and Friend for ever. At least, Paul seems to have thought so when he spoke of the consolation of knowing the "Christ that died, *yea rather* is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." The life of my Lord did not end nineteen hundred years ago! Just that He might be not a local Christ, or a Christ for one age alone, He rose into that unchanging life that knows no periods, no epochs, no time, but is an *Eternal Now*; and He is with me to-day.

Some Christians seem to be living only upon a *past* Christ, and some only on a *future* Christ. I would seek to live upon a *present* Christ, and find

my comfort and my sanctity in that; and all the more when I remember that the past the present and the future are all in the one great Lord who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," so that my *faith* can cling to the Christ who died, my *love* rest satisfied in the Christ who is risen, and my *hope* expect with joy the Christ who is to come again; for, to the heart that knows Him, He is really "all," not merely the alpha and the omega, *but all the letters between.*

My faith in Him as the Christ of *history* is confirmed and intensified when I see that He is the Christ of *experience* also—a Christ whom tens of thousands have tried, have trusted, have rejoiced in, have found an all-sufficing Redeemer and Friend. All down the ages, He has been doing in His invisible risen life, the same wonders of grace and power that He did, in visible form, in Judea and Galilee centuries ago. How many millions of crushed hearts since then have heard Him say just what He said of old, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest;" how many a sinful soul has heard Him say, "Be thou clean;" how many a penitent has heard Him say, as distinctly as He said it to the dying thief, "To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise!" To how many a bereaved one He has repeated His old consolation, "I am the Resurrection and the Life!" At how many an Emmaus has He made Himself known in the breaking of bread! How often has He said

to trembling and dispirited ones just what He said in the upper room, "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?" All down the ages His *voice* has been heard *speaking* peace, and His *presence* has been felt *bestowing* it.

Have I not myself had experiences of His grace that I cannot dispute, experiences I would not part with for a thousand worlds? I recognise in His words of old the very *tone* in which He has spoken to my own heart many a time. To me the Christ of history and the Christ of experience are one—"that same Jesus"; and I see that instead of its being difficult for me to trust this Christ whom I have never seen, because His earthly life now lies so far back in the past, it is becoming every day easier to do it, because the number of those who have trusted Him and found Him true is increasing every day. He stands before me now in a glory He never had before, a Saviour whose grace has been tested and experienced by "a multitude that no man can number, out of every kindred and nation and people and tongue." He is not now, as He once was, a poor "Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief," rejected and despised; He is a great Redeeming Lord into whose hands millions have put all that they counted most dear; on the faith of whose promises millions have lived blessed lives and died triumphant deaths. Thousands have died for Him; thousands more *would* have died for Him if He

had asked them to do it. How much easier it is for me to trust this Christ, when I see how millions have trusted Him before me, than if I had been one out of a very few that had discovered Him to be worthy of trust at all ! It is no new experiment I am called to make when summoned to follow a Christ like this. The bridge by which I am urged to cross the surging flood is no new structure, untested, and possibly insecure. It has been trodden already by the feet of ten thousand times ten thousand heavily-burdened men, and it has stood the strain. Not one plank has started these nineteen hundred years. Surely I may plant *my* feet where so many millions have already planted *theirs*. Let me often go back, in adoring thought, to the place where Jesus died ; but let me also think of Him steadily as the Living One who dieth no more, and who is with me still. I will think much of Jesus *on the cross*, but, if I can, I will think even more of Jesus *on the throne above*, and Jesus *in my heart* below. Then the tone of my Saviour's question will be very sweet, " Why art *thou* troubled, and why do thoughts arise in *thy* heart, if I am beside thee every day ? "

The thoughts that arise in my heart may be *doubting* thoughts, *anxious* thoughts, *regretful* thoughts, *remorseful* thoughts, but I will let *this* thought be as the sun that banishes the mists, " My Lord is with me still." If I am " troubled " with thoughts of my sin He tells me that He " rose

again for my justification," that He bore my sin upon Him into the grave and left it there, and now to me "there is no condemnation." If I am "troubled" by the chafing of my sorrows and cares, He tells me that what He rose from the grave to give me is His perfect peace. I will just sit still and let His peace come in. If I am "troubled" with the thought of death, and my lying in the grave, He tells me that He passed through it too, and consecrated it for me by lying there Himself; so that "because He lives, I shall live also." I will therefore "fear no evil," but let the Conqueror of Death take me by the hand and lead me through. My grasp of Him may then be weak enough, but His mighty grasp of me defies both death and hell. With the Risen One as my Life I cannot perish; and if I believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are laid to sleep by Jesus, God will bring with *Him*; and I "comfort myself with these words."

L

THE THOUGHTFULNESS OF CHRIST

“Children, have ye any meat?”—JOHN xxi. 5.

THE beautiful story, in the midst of which this question lies, shows me again the graciousness of my Master in a most attractive way. The disciples had gone to Galilee, as they were commanded to do; and while waiting for His promised coming to them, had betaken themselves, for present needs, to their old craft as fishermen. This, too, was in accordance with His instructions that, until Pentecost set them absolutely free for their spiritual work, they would need to rely upon their own resources. That, of course, did not hinder them from daily expectation of His coming. Their days were given to that, and their nights to providing for their earthly wants. Possibly, as the days went by and He did not come, they began to be discouraged by hope deferred, and had almost given up the expectation that had cheered them at

first. At least, it is certain that an appearance of their Master on the morning of that day was the last thing they were looking for. Yet it was just when least expected, and when they needed Him most, that He stood beside them, and gave them a new proof that He was the same thoughtful, considerate, and Almighty Friend they had long known Him to be.

It is worthy of note that, in speaking to them from the high ground on the shore, He did not call them *teknia*—"My little children"—as He used to do. That was a *sacred* word—a word which would have recalled the upper room so vividly as to betray Him at once. He only said *paidia*—"Young men"—or, as we, in our colloquial, would say, "boys"—that being the customary word of greeting from any stranger passing by. The Master's disclosures of Himself are only to faith and love; but, just to evoke the faith and love, He veils Himself, and puts on the air of a stranger.

But I have here a beautiful illustration of how interested my great Lord is in the smallest things of my daily need. He comes to me just when I am busy with my humblest duties; He anticipates my wants; He cares for my body as well as for my soul; He can think of my requiring sustenance after long labour and weariness; and He provides that first, before He speaks to me of higher things. His loving thoughtfulness shows Him to be my

brother-man—a brotherly Christ who is deeply interested in the common business of my life, and who sits down beside me as I eat what His own bounty has provided, and what His presence sanctifies and cheers. That fire on the coals and that abundant haul must have seemed to these disciples to say—and they say it to me—“With Me to care for you, you will never want: be sure henceforth, that when you go forth to serve Me, I will look after the supplies.” The soldiers of this King will never be allowed to starve. He Himself will attend to the commissariat.

This story tells me, that, when engaged in my lawful calling, the Master is not ashamed to come to me in my homely work and coarse attire; but it also tells me, that in that earthly calling, even my largest experience will not bring me success, till He directs me to it. “The race is not to the swift, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill.” Unless the Lord fills the net, the scholar, the preacher, the merchant, the tradesman, the statesman, may toil all night and catch nothing. And very powerfully is it suggested to me here, that His interposition often comes just when human effort has completely failed. Indeed He lets the failure become absolutely disheartening, on very purpose to prepare the way for manifesting His power. It would have been just as easy for Him to fill that net during the night as in the early

morning ; but then the disciples would have attributed their success to themselves and not to Him ; and He lets human helplessness be at its worst before He gives His richest and His best. He gives His best, too, in unlikely places, as well as at unlikely times. Very rarely have my best blessings been found just *where* I was expecting them, or just *as* I was expecting them either. I have found a blessing come to me in sickness that I never found in health. I have found it in some dark trial, though I missed it when the world was bright. I have found it one day in the same house of prayer where, on hundreds of previous days, I had found nothing for my soul. Some verse of Scripture that I had known from my childhood, that was quite familiar but yet had no special interest for me, came to my mind in some critical moment of my life, and instantly became luminous with the light of God—a message that brought me rest at once. God often finds men where they are not expecting Him. They miss Him in their accustomed life at home ; but, for some reason or other, of business or of health, they go abroad, and in a foreign land that hand lays hold of them which they had long resisted here and shaken off. He “leads the blind by a way that they know not.” His ways of *grace* have the same inscription as His ways in Providence, “past finding out.”

This is the Divine side of the matter ; but I

must not forget that there is a human side of it too. The *grace*-side the Lord keeps in His own hands alone; but the *duty*-side, the *prayer*-side He leaves in mine. Just because He so lovingly concerns Himself with all my smallest affairs, He would have me consult Him about them all. I am quite ready to consult Him about the great things of life. I am eager to consult Him about the perplexing and sorrowful things, but the minor things of daily routine I think I can manage myself! And yet how often have I seen a long train of events, which changed the whole course of a human life to its latest hour, set in motion by some trivial, unforeseen, "accidental" occurrence, on a day that, when it began, seemed just like any other day, with no special danger in it, and no special significance attaching to it. A few words spoken, a hasty bargain made, a casual introduction on the street, or in the house of a friend, the writing or the receiving of a letter—a hundred such things as these may easily change the whole colour of a life, so that the memory of the day on which they happened will be either a lifelong joy or a lifelong regret; and yet, when the day began, there was nothing to forewarn what the issues of it would be.

It is no wonder, surely, in view of this, that God's command to me is "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." But if He promises to guide me not only in the

broad *highways* of my life, but in its smallest and obscurest *paths*, because even in the smallest I *need* to be led, it is the least He can expect that I should *ask* Him to do it. I cannot but think that these disciples on the lake must have prayed for the Master's help, as they remembered how marvellously He had filled their net three years before. I cannot but think of them as saying one to another, "Oh, that the great Master were with us now!" There were many strong heart-longings at least, in that weary night, and if these aspirations were not definite *prayers* they were the next thing to that; and by the watchful, gracious Master they were taken as prayers and answered to the full.

Once more, I see here that God's rich blessings are sure to be *very humbling* to the heart that receives them. There is nothing like the exceeding abundance of the Lord's goodness for making a man feel his own unworthiness. An awe and silence fell on the disciples as soon as John said, "It is the Lord." They could only wonder and adore; and was not that a preparation of them for bearing the great success soon to be given them as *fishers of men*? When *that* success came, they would not thank themselves, but only *Him*. It is sometimes said that great spiritual success, like great earthly success, tends to make the heart proud; and that one so honoured will need great grace to keep him low. Ah! the success itself will humble him, if he is a true man of God at

all. To think that God should so bless *him*, sinful as he is—that of itself will make him lie very low, and give God the glory. Let me so honour my Master all along; and then, when the long night is past, and in the early morning of the Eternal Day He provides for me the feast upon the shore, I shall not doubt whose voice it is I hear, whose love it is I taste. I shall know in a moment that “it is the Lord”—for *none but He could do so gracious a thing as that*—my Lord and Master thus fulfilling to me His promise, “I will sup with him, and he with Me,” and saying on the shore of heaven, just what He said on the shore of the Syrian lake, “Come and dine.”

LI

THE DEEPEST QUESTION OF ALL

“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?”—
JOHN xxi. 15.

A DEEPLY affecting question this ! and the shame-stricken Peter must have felt it so ; for, though it gave him the opportunity of a new and very sincere declaration of love to his Lord, it could not fail to remind him, gently yet keenly, how his former protestations had been belied. But it is worthy of note that when Jesus asked, “ Lovest thou Me *more than these* ? ” Peter made no reference to the “ more than these ” in his reply. He was done now with all boastful comparisons. He would not now even hint that he was a better disciple than the rest. Too humble now for that, he only said, “ Thou knowest that I love Thee.”

The Master’s use of the old name “ Simon,” instead of the new name, “ Peter,” was suggestive of much. It was not to imply that he had for-

feited all right to the new name; but it was a gentle reminder to him of the weakness which had led to his denial; and it would recall to him the Master's words *before* his fall, when He purposely abstained from giving him the name that implied firmness and strength, but used instead the old name, "Simon," which bore to "Peter" the same relation that "*Jacob*" (the "supplanter") bore to "*Israel*" (the "prince of God") — "Simon, Simon, Satan desired to have thee, that he might sift thee as wheat, but I prayed for thee that thy faith might not fail."

Very lovingly had Jesus already assured the penitent disciple of His forgiveness. One of the first messages He sent as the Risen One was a message specially to Peter. One of the first private interviews He gave to any disciple was given to Peter; and from that interview he must have come away knowing himself to be a fully pardoned man. Still, the use of the old name here again must have gone to Peter's heart, making him think, with new shame and sorrow, of his old self-confidence and pride.

But all his pride was now thoroughly killed. He had learned, at last, to take the lowest place, which is the only safe place for *any* man to take. Probably, none of the eleven did love the Master so deeply as he; but he would not say so, or even think so, now. He had profited by his terrible fall. He had grown greatly in grace since then,

grown in knowledge of himself, as well as in knowledge of his Lord; and all he now said showed him clothed in that beautiful humility which is one of the surest marks of maturity in the school of Christ. He was "grieved," indeed, when, for a third time, Jesus asked him, "Lovest thou me?" for that *looked* as if the Master was still suspicious of him; but there was no anger, no irritation, in Peter even then. He only said, with eager voice, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Such a restoration from backsliding as had been vouchsafed to Peter is always sure to make an exceedingly humble soul. There is no more tender, humble heart to be found anywhere than the heart of a recovered backslider. It is at once a humble and a joyful heart; humble, because its sin it can never forget; joyful, because God has forgotten it for ever. The joy of pardon never destroys humility. The joy and the humility go hand in hand.

But now, let me take this as my Master's question *to myself*; and see how deep it goes, not only into my feelings, but into my life. For it is not, "Believest thou Me?" or "Understandest thou Me?" or "Confessest thou Me?" or "Obeyest thou Me?" or even, "Servest thou Me?" It goes closer home. It is, "*Lovest thou Me?*"; and all these other things may be where *love* is not. Again, He does not ask, "Lovest thou

My word?" or "Lovest thou My work?" or "Lovest thou My brethren?" He asks, "Lovest thou *Me*?" And yet again, He does not ask, "Art thou in the company of those that love Me?" He will not let me shelter myself by losing myself in a crowd who all profess to love Him. He brings me out into the light, to stand alone, and asks, "Lovest *thou* Me?"

What answer shall I give? It is easy, in a glow of enthusiasm, to say, "Lord, thou knowest that I love Thee," but how difficult it is to *show* my love in unmistakable and practical ways! I am often finding myself in circumstances where my love to Him is tested, and severely tested, too. I am often so placed that I must choose between following Him and following the world that is utterly opposed to Him—between openly confessing Him and meanly being ashamed of Him. A real confession of my love to this Divine Master will sometimes cost much self-denial: the loss of the world's love, for the sake of keeping His; the loss, perhaps, of some of the world's high honours and rewards, if I stand true to Him; the loss, even, of the love of friends who are dear as my very life. I may have to suffer things as painful as the cutting off of a right hand or the plucking out of a right eye. And yet, when My Master asks me to show, in this way, my devotion to Him, He does not *argue* with me; He only says—and that implies everything—"Lovest *thou* Me?"

I made myself of no reputation for thee; *Lovest thou Me?* I hid not My face from shame and spitting for thee; *Lovest thou Me?* I died for thee; *Lovest thou Me?* He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; *Lovest thou Me?* " That is all He says; but surely it is enough. When He shows me sins that must be relinquished, if I am to enjoy His fellowship; when He shows me that the way to heaven is too narrow for the great burdens of worldliness that I want to carry on my shoulders; and, pointing to all the attractions of the broad road which He wants me to condemn, asks me if I am willing to make a complete surrender, He only puts it thus, "*Lovest thou Me?*" For what He wants from me is a practical expression of my theoretical love, an expression in act, as well as on the lip; and, though it may be a *hard*, it will always be a *blessed*, answer, if I can give it, "Lord, thou *seest* all things, Thou *seest* that I love Thee."

And others ought to see it too. My love to Christ ought to be a visible love. Let me ask myself, therefore, what proofs of my love to Christ I am giving in my daily life. From my demeanour and conversation in my home would any one gather that I love my Lord and Saviour with an ardent love? If I never talk about Him as worthy of love, how can others believe that I regard Him so? If I never boldly take His part,

when His laws are despised, or His authority is contemned ; if I see, and do not rebuke, the sins that dishonour and grieve Him, how can I make good my profession of loyal love to Himself ? If I never think of Him or speak of Him as a dear friend, who is gone away for a time, but is soon to come again ; if my heart never thrills with joy in the hope of His “glorious appearing,” so that I am setting everything in order to meet His eye, how can I prove my possession of that love to which separation is a sorrow ? Do I make my love to Him as plain and incontrovertible as He makes His love to me ? I have never to *ask Him*, “Lovest Thou me ?” If I did, He would answer in a moment, by pointing to the *proof* He gave of that, and say, “Behold My hands and My feet.” He bears in His glorified body the “print of the nails,” proofs of His wonderful love to me. But what a contrast between that love and mine ! His so *strong*, and mine so weak ; His so *changeless*, and mine so fickle ; His so *active*, and mine so indolent ; His so *open*, and mine so secret ; His so *ardent*, and mine so cold !

Nothing but meditating on *His* love can thoroughly kindle mine, or make it glow as a living fire. It was that alone that stirred the heart of Peter ; and that alone can stir this heart of mine. I cannot *force* myself to love Christ. Love never comes that way. I think of His love to me, and then my heart goes out to meet that love of His.

My Love goes out, just because, first of all, *His love* has come in.

Would that I could both feel and show that “the love of Christ *constraineth* me, to live not to myself, but unto Him.” That would be my daily victory, as well as my daily joy: for, far stronger than the power of fear is the sweet power of love. It is possible to give up sin, and make sacrifices for God, by saying, “The fear of hell compelleth me”; but that will only make life a burden, and each act of sacrifice a pain. When I can put it quite otherwise, and give as my motive this, “the love of Christ constraineth me,” my heart is light, and every sacrifice a joy.

“Lord, it is my chief complaint,
That my love is weak and faint;
Yet I love Thee, and adore;
Oh for grace to love Thee more!’

LII

A SINGLE EYE

“Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.”—JOHN xxi. 21, 22.

IN this last question from my Master’s lips, I find one of His most comprehensive directions for my Christian life. He carries me away beyond all my speculative and practical difficulties by saying “What is that to thee?”, and He sums up all my duty in the simple words, “Follow thou Me.”

As meant for Peter, there was a manifest allusion in them to his former boast, “Lord, I will follow Thee to prison and to death.” The Lord went back to that old profession, and said, “You remember how you wished to follow Me; well, I take you at your word, you shall not only die *for* Me, but die *like* Me too.” How accurate a record does this Master keep of His disciples’ professions! Never does any protestation of loyalty fall from

me, but He will remind me of it some day, and claim a fulfilment of it.

It might be supposed that Peter's question about John arose from a feeling of jealousy, but it was rather the fruit of curiosity, springing out of the ardent affection that bound these two men together. John and he had long been the closest of friends; and Peter, with a vision of suffering before him, wonders whether, in the future as in the past, he will have the companionship of John: "What shall be the lot appointed for *him*? Shall we still be together, or shall I henceforth be without the help and sympathy of my dearest friend?" There was no jealousy; only affection. But the tone of the Master's reply shows that Peter was still, as he had always been, too much of a "busybody in other men's matters," too fond of looking after and managing others, just as he had more than once tried to manage the Master Himself. There is an accent of rebuke, therefore, in the question "What is that to Thee?"

But, leaving Peter, let me carry this question into every department of my own life—my speculative life on the one hand, and my practical life on the other; for it will not fail to be a helpful guide in both. One thing, at least, comes very clearly here to view; that the main business of every Christian is with *himself*. With the destinies of others, and even with the duties of others, he has very much less to do than with his own.

Some men, of ardent, energetic temperament, seem to have very exaggerated ideas of the extent of their responsibility. They seem to live only to keep all other people straight. No heresy can anywhere be broached, but they must rush to the front and expose it. No iniquity can anywhere be practised, but they must drag it into the light to condemn it. God made them keepers of their own vineyards, but they spend all their time in looking after other men's vines. Unquestionably there is something noble in this temper; but there is something quixotic too; and Christ seems here to teach that He imposes upon no man such a responsibility. The world is sadly full of evil, scepticism, infidelity, superstition, immorality, on every side. What, then, am I as a Christian to do? Simply to obey my Master's command, "Follow thou Me,—protest assuredly, where a protest must be made, to clear yourself of all complicity in sin; protest where a protest is needed to save a brother, and to put a wrong-doer to shame; but before all that, be thou a true disciple, whoever may be false; be thou thyself a holy example of justice and mercy and purity and truth, though all the world should be only a sweltering mass of impiety, and impurity, and wrong."

The application, however, of the Master's words may legitimately be carried farther than this. There are many things I may wish to know, which really do not concern me much; and which I had

better leave in the obscurity where God has left them, till the breaking of the day. My curiosity would sometimes like to be able to read the course of His future providence, not only regarding myself, but also regarding the world at large. I try to construct out of dim prophetic intimations, an exact picture of the future history of the nations of the earth. I am tempted to read the "Book of Revelation" as if it were a sort of time-table and almanac combined; and try to find there the exact day when the battle of Armageddon will be fought, the precise hour for the rapture of the saints, the very minute of the final victory, when the Lord "shall descend from heaven with a shout." Follies like these bring a sober forecasting of future perils into disrepute, and do incalculable damage to faith. The Master's words need to be remembered still, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father has put in His own power"; and so, from all fantastic speculations about the destinies of the world's kingdoms and thrones, He brings me back to the safer region of humble duty, saying "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me."

The *present* course of God's providence, too, may sometimes disquiet and perplex, when the thoughts revert, not only inquiringly, but complainingly, to the seeming injustice of His ways. Why is one home almost exempt from sorrows, while another beside it is overwhelmed by a constant succession

of them? Why are the young, with all life's possibilities opening out before them, so often cut down before they have been able to accomplish anything; and the aged, whose work is past, kept lying for years in uselessness, like stranded hulks dropping to pieces by slow decay? Why does death take away the stay of the home just when dependent little ones need most a parent's care; while others who have long been tottering on the edge of the grave are left to linger on, a burden to themselves? Why are the great riches of the world not more equally divided? Why is gold poured into one man's lap, while hundreds of far better men than he, are, in spite of all that industry and prudence can do, perpetually defeated in the race? Many a true-hearted Christ-follower feels that surely there is something wrong in all this. For, say what he will about the compensations which God provides in present enrichments of grace, say what he will about the grander recompenses of eternity, it is no easy thing for a crushed and defeated man to be still, and keep all murmuring down. But if anything will help him, this question of the Master's will (for He knew well what a crushed life means), "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me."

This same question may suffice to carry me over difficulties connected with *doctrines* of the faith that rest upon unrevealed mysteries behind them. If I am perplexing myself with such things as the

fall of man, the sin of the angels, the salvability of the heathen, the locality of heaven, and of the spirits in prison, the decrees of God that seem to destroy the free will of man, or that great problem that presses with equal force on the brain of the wisest philosopher and the heart of the little child, why God permitted the entrance of sin into the world at the first, and why He permits its dominion still ; I can not only calm myself by the reflection that probably these are depths that no created mind can sound ; but still more by the voice of my heavenly Lord, who does not explain any one of them, but says, "Leave mysteries to God, and do thou thine own work of following Me."

It is very unimportant for me to know how many will be saved at last ; but it is immensely important to make sure that I am saved myself. It is quite unessential to know whether there is hope for the heathen who have never seen the Light ; but it is all-essential to make sure that I, seeing it, do not perish through despising it. It matters little whether or not I know how sin began ; but it matters greatly whether I am accepting the grace that takes sin away. Should I refuse to enter the lifeboat that waits to rescue me from the burning ship, till I satisfy my curiosity about the origin of the fire ? What my Lord and Master promises me is not a *perfect insight* ; but a *perfect rest*. I may well be content

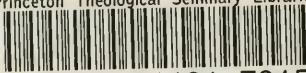
to be ignorant of what He has not seen it needful to reveal. At least, the power of perplexities to unsettle me will be over, when I listen obediently to His voice saying, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me."

In the region of practical discipleship too, let me get guidance from these words. The difficulty of making a true stand for Christ in the world is always a real one; but sometimes it becomes exceedingly acute. When I am laughed at for my scrupulosity by nearly every friend beside me; when, not only in my larger social circle, but in my own family, I meet only with coldness or sneers; the force of the current drags me down against my will, and I am sometimes nearly swept off my feet; I begin to feel that it is, perhaps, presumptuous in me to take so lofty a tone. All round me think me "fanatical," and tell me I am "righteous over much," till I begin to doubt whether I am right in determining to be so separate from the world's ways, since all I seem to gain by it is the nickname of a "bigot," and a "Pharisee."

Just in that mood, let me listen to the great Master's voice, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me"; and that will nerve me at once. The "offence of the cross" is still as great as ever; "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution"; "A man's foes, still, are often those of his own household." But what finer field

could I desire for showing how true my heart is beating to Christ than just this one where, if I follow Him at all, I must follow through thorns and briars that tear me at every step? To all my discouragements, and all my doubts, He has but this one reply, "Friends may misjudge you, the world may revile you, your own brethren in the Kingdom may not sympathise with you, but what then? I, your Lord, had once to stand alone, unbefriended, misjudged, ridiculed, for you; will you be afraid to stand alone and be scorned for Me. What is all that to thee? *Follow thou Me.*"

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